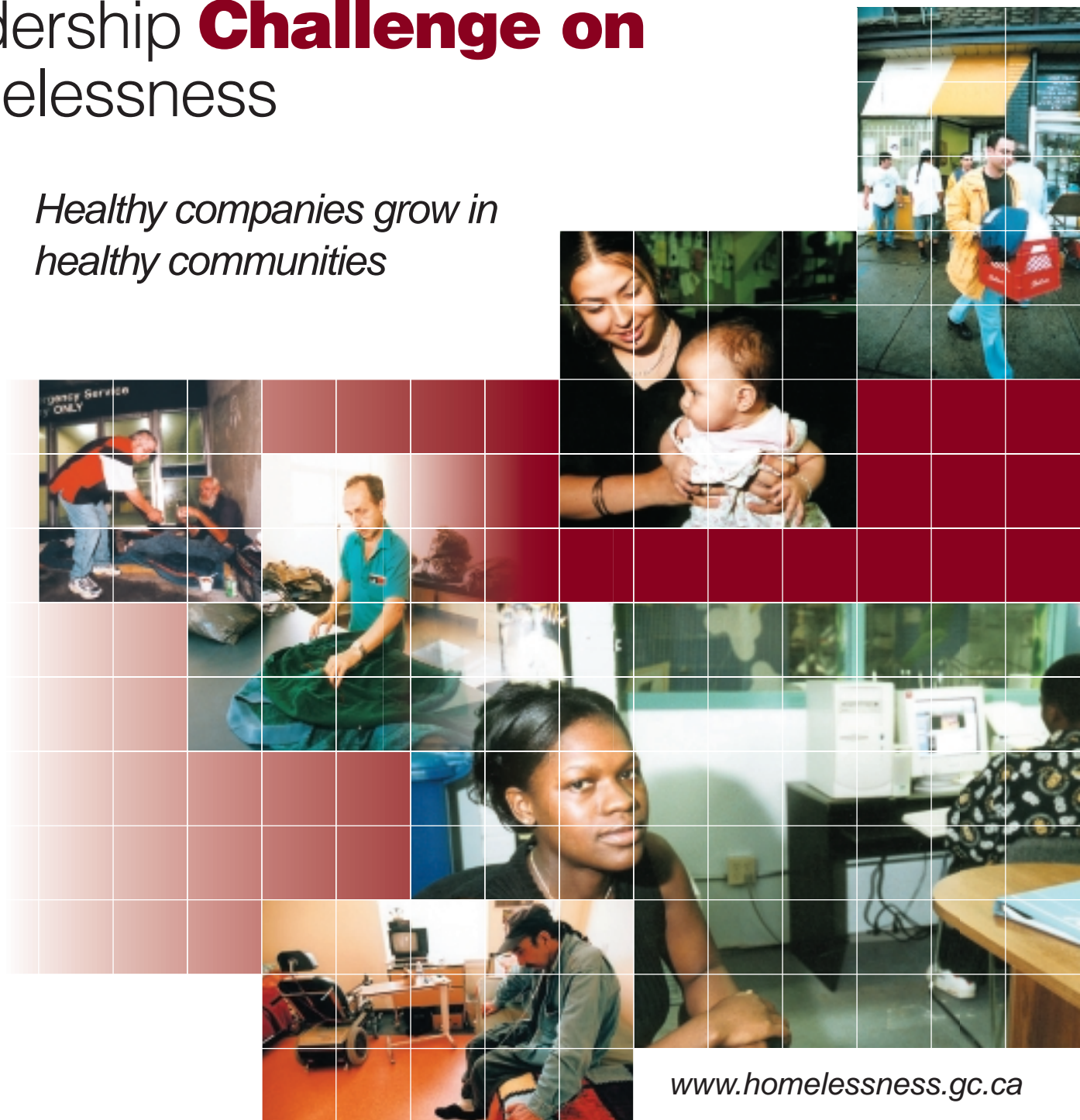




Leadership **Challenge on** Homelessness

*Healthy companies grow in
healthy communities*



www.homelessness.gc.ca

Special thanks to the following individuals for reviewing this guide:

- Kathrin Bohr, Canadian Business for Social Responsibility
- Zachariah Ezekiel, The Conference Board of Canada
- Bob Willard, author of The Sustainability Advantage

Get Connected

Every organization and individual has knowledge, expertise and resources that can go a long way in helping to address homelessness. The contacts listed below can help you turn your interest in wanting to address homelessness into action.

National Contacts

National Secretariat on Homelessness
Web address: www.homelessness.gc.ca
Telephone number: 1-800-O-Canada

The following pages summarize all the suggested activities in this guide. Following up on even one activity helps make you part of the solution to homelessness. This action helps your community, which in turn helps your company. Together we can create healthy communities for growing healthy companies!

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Introduction

This guide provides a number of ways that different members in your company can rise to the challenge of both strengthening your organization and offering greatly needed support to individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The activities range from something as simple as recycling your printer ink cartridges to an uncomplicated way of helping to build a home for a family in need. **Simply making the commitment to consider new ways of doing everyday activities can make it easy for you to have a real impact on your company and your community.**

In the following pages there are numerous suggestions on how within some of the most common areas of responsibility in an organization, be it community relations, human resources, etc., you can help homeless people. There are also a number of stories included that show how the business community is assuming leadership in this area. Information is also provided to help you understand the factors that lead to homelessness and to gain a better appreciation of where you may be able to help.

Did you know?

Over 8 in 10 Canadians consistently believe that companies should go beyond their traditional economic role and work to build a better society. Out of 22 countries surveyed, Canada ranked third highest in this perspective, after Australia and the United Kingdom.

*Globe Scan,
2003 CSR Monitor*



Homelessness is a business issue


Homelessness undermines a community's ability to reach its full potential, and represents a growing trend in communities across Canada. This trend does not solely affect individuals – many communities are showing a marked increase in families using emergency shelters. Youth and Aboriginal people are also growing sub-populations.

The working poor are finding it increasingly challenging to cover essentials, such as housing, food, medication, and clothing. To illustrate this point, according to the **Canadian Association of Food Banks**, (www.cafb.ca) food banks and meal programs have shown a constant growth in demand over the past 20 years. In March 2004, over 840,000 different people turned to a food bank for emergency food supplies; and 2.72 million meals were served through meal programs. Often difficult choices are being made to forego one or more basic necessities – decisions that are placing more individuals and families at risk of becoming homeless.

These trends influence businesses directly. Greater strain on the working poor affects the overall productivity of these individuals, reducing net gains to our economy.

Homeless individuals are also often overlooked as a valuable resource for meeting labour shortages. Aboriginal people are one of the fastest growing populations in Canada and should be considered as a viable resource to address these labour needs. Youth are keen to be engaged in gainful employment, but sometimes do not have the opportunity to access jobs, given their limited training and experience. Chronically homeless people are individuals that have difficulty breaking the cycle of homelessness. Primarily these are individuals with mental health issues, disabilities, and substance abuse issues; some of whom, with the right supports, can be valuable contributing members of the labour market.

People sleeping in streets and doorways and panhandling are only a fraction of the people who are homeless. But their growing presence in Canadian communities, both rural and urban, **has become an issue for business, working to attract both consumers and employees.** The solution does not lie in the marginalization of these individuals



into more remote parts of our communities. This often puts them at risk of a worse fate and further entrenches problems in some of our most disadvantaged communities. **Real business solutions are needed for a very real business issue.**

The Government of Canada's National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) cornerstone program, the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), supports communities' efforts to develop solutions to homelessness. Through the NHI, communities have been able to strengthen their ability to develop innovative partnerships involving the corporate sector, as well as community organizations and all levels of government, to succeed in establishing sustainable, long-term solutions to the issue of homelessness.

Across the country, scores of private sector organizations, companies and individuals have risen to the challenge, contributing in a variety of ways to local projects. Their contributions range from collaborative planning and implementation, to donations of cash, goods and services, and supporting staff in voluntary roles.

Since 1999, over 3000 partnerships with non-governmental organizations, private sector and other governmental partners have leveraged substantial resources. The total of this contribution is valued at over \$900 million. These partnerships have helped establish emergency supports to address immediate needs, such as shelter and food.

At this point, communities are moving forward in stabilizing these emergency supports, creating long-term supportive housing, affordable housing and other preventative measures. To do this successfully, the intelligence and involvement of all members of our communities is needed. This includes the corporate sector that has the expertise and ability to help develop meaningful solutions to homelessness with lasting benefits for individuals, communities and Canada as a whole.

There are many concrete ways, both large and small, that business can be involved right now. Together our efforts strengthen our communities, making them more vibrant places to live and work.

Getting involved is good business

Did you know?

Among shareholders **74%** say executives have a responsibility to measure the impact their policies have on local communities and employees.

Canadian Democracy and Corporate Accountability Commission, 2001



Good decisions for your company and for your community do not have to be mutually exclusive. This document provides a number of suggestions on how your company can benefit from a strong social commitment and community presence that can provide you with a unique competitive advantage.

More than 80% of Canadians are concerned about homelessness – in business terms, this concern is most likely shared by many of your employees, customers, shareholders, and key stakeholders.

Proactive action on homelessness will most likely resonate well with both employees and clients, and provide you with a simple way of gaining their attention and a competitive edge.

Strengthening the community position and sustainability of your company can be achieved through many of the activities highlighted in this document and can help to create social capital for your benefit, including:

- Enhanced corporate image
- Attraction and retention of strong, committed employees
- Increased employee morale, creativity and innovation
- Greater customer loyalty
- Creation of goodwill in communities where you operate, as well in communities in which you aim to expand your operations
- Strong connection with community leaders which provides a greater appreciation of local challenges and opportunities for business development
- Strengthened position with regulatory bodies

All of the above are important to Canada's leading CEOs, as reflected in KPMG's ninth annual survey of *Canada's Most Respected Corporations*, conducted by Ipsos-Reid. CEOs' top 5 priorities for 2004 are: focusing on the long-term financial health of the company; increasing productivity and improving performance; attracting and retaining high-calibre employees; increasing customer loyalty; and ensuring the trust of shareholders.¹

The fact that over four/fifths of the population is concerned about homelessness shows that it is an important social issue that employees, customers, shareholders, and key stakeholders will respond to if the corporate sector rises to the leadership challenge.

1. Over a three-month period, from August to November 2003, 255 of the leading CEOs in Canada were surveyed.

Community relations

If you are responsible for some of the following activities, this section outlines a number of ways you can get involved in helping to develop solutions to homelessness as part of everyday activities:

- Public relations
- Community investment program
- Corporate donation and philanthropy program
- Corporate foundation

Here are some suggestions that may help to further the returns on your company's community investment and increase the effectiveness of your programming:

- Connect with local Community Advisory Boards for the NHI to help determine where your financial contribution can make the greatest impact (Refer to page 21).
- Educate others about the community planning process and how it is beneficial for making decisions related to philanthropic programs.
- Develop support guidelines for your company's philanthropy application to help community groups better understand your company's selection criteria.
- Propose that your company consider developing a community investment fund that supports homeless people.
- Link your company's community investment funding with a foundation that supports similar activities.
- Encourage corporate peers within your sector to consider how collectively you can make an impact on homelessness.
- Create a funding network with a number of corporate partners to cluster your community investment.
- Foster a company policy that allows employees paid days for volunteerism.
- Organize workshops to connect employees with community groups, helping both to develop different capacities and to learn from each other.





Fairmont Adopt-A-Shelter & Iris Kirby House

St. John's, Newfoundland

Pioneered as a grassroots initiative to redistribute hotel items where they were needed most, over a decade later, **Fairmont Hotels & Resorts Adopt-A-Shelter** program has grown into a diversified program that addresses homelessness and hunger. Each Fairmont hotel in North America is partnered with a community shelter, many of which assist victims of domestic violence. A thriving example

of this multi-faceted partnership is **The Fairmont Newfoundland's** association with **Iris Kirby House**. In addition to supporting and regularly providing personal items that result in significant cost savings for Iris Kirby House, The Fairmont Newfoundland also supports and hosts annual events specifically for the shelter residents. According to Iris Kirby House, this involvement "indicates that the corporate sector is willing to take a proactive approach, and make a public statement that they are interested in helping end violence against women and their resulting homelessness." While the shelter staff certainly values the "much needed resources" that The Fairmont Newfoundland provides, the most significant benefit "has been the message of empowerment to our residents – that they do have the support of a caring community." The hotel considers the relationship "mutually beneficial," matching "our strengths to their needs."

“People with some influence and the desire to make a difference describe the membership of BCAPI. By using our community resources wisely, being results focused and measuring our progress, we CAN make a difference.”

*Derek Oland, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer,
Moosehead Breweries Limited*

Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative

Saint John, New Brunswick

The Saint John Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (BCAPI) is a self-funded coalition of 100 business leaders and professionals who are working together with people living in poverty to accelerate their journey out of poverty by helping to remove or reduce the roadblocks. Mobilizing the business community

from within, BCAPI uses the resources, talents, discipline and influence of business community members, partnered with the expertise and experience of the community, to address this critical community issue.

BCAPI’s long-term goal is to significantly reduce poverty for the next generation. It supports and partners with local initiatives that seek to prevent poverty from taking hold, such as teen pregnancy prevention education, and build “assets” (physical, financial, social, and personal) particularly for single parent families and at-risk children and youth. BCAPI is also involved in strategic poverty related projects including the development of an affordable housing strategy; raising public awareness of the effects of poverty; and convening a multi-sector roundtable to lead a poverty reduction strategy for Saint John.

“BCAPI does their best work after going to the places where people living in poverty feel safe – to hear their stories and their voices.”

*Brenda Murphy,
Coordinator, Saint John Urban Core Support Network*

“People with some influence and the desire to make a difference describes the membership of BCAPI,” commented **Derek Oland, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Moosehead Breweries Limited** and member of BCAPI.

“By using our community resources wisely, being results focused and measuring our progress, we CAN make a difference.”

Brenda Murphy, Coordinator, **Saint John Urban Core Support Network** (a community coalition of people living in poverty and those, on the frontlines, who work with them) was pleased to acknowledge that, “when BCAPI gets involved in our community’s social initiatives, they bring tremendous influence and open doors that the non-profit sector can find difficult to access. One of BCAPI’s challenges is understanding what it is really like for people who live in poverty. They do their best work after going to the places where people living in poverty feel safe – to hear their stories and their voices.”

Human Resources

If you are responsible for some of the following activities, this section outlines a number of ways you can get involved in helping to develop solutions to homelessness as part of everyday activities:

- Recruiting, hiring and retaining staff.
- Identifying training and development opportunities as part of career planning.
- Facilitating team building exercises.
- Implementing diversity and equality of opportunity policies.
- Supporting staff in retirement planning.
- Fostering opportunities for leadership development through coaching and mentoring initiatives.



Here are some suggestions that will allow teams in your office to enhance their personal development while strengthening group performance:

- As team building exercises, pick up food, cook and serve a meal at a local shelter, or coordinate activities and deliver items for a food or toy drive.
 - Provide mentorship for homeless individuals for job skills training, e.g. resume writing, interview coaching.
- Encourage the company to consider hiring individuals through employment training programs.
 - Encourage employees to volunteer with community organizations as an opportunity for personal skill development.
 - For employee payroll giving programs, recognize homeless service agencies as potential recipients.

Employee committee

Did you know?

88% of employees of large companies say corporate social responsibility increases their motivation and loyalty.

*Globe Scan,
2004 CSR Monitor*

88%

If you are responsible for some of the following activities, this section outlines a number of ways you can get involved in helping to develop solutions to homelessness as part of everyday activities:

- Providing staff with a mechanism to influence decisions and facilitating activities that help to bridge management and staff.
- Responding to staff interest in being involved in efforts that support the community.
- Arranging social activities for staff.
- Orientation for new staff.
- Facilitating activities to boost employee morale and motivation.

Here are some suggestions that will provide an opportunity to strengthen group cohesion while gaining a sense of accomplishment in their collective activity:

- Sort and distribute donated clothing, shoes or other necessities.
- Volunteer with an organization that builds houses for families, e.g. a one-day build.
- Donate resources and help to renovate a local community facility, e.g. paint a day care facility or plant a community garden.
- As a staff event, host a fundraising activity.
- During the holidays, host a party at a local shelter and hold your company gift exchange for children living there.
- Support families moving out of emergency shelter by donating old household items (e.g. furniture) and offering to help them move.
- Create “start-up kits” for families moving into transitional facilities, including cleaning products, kitchen supplies, etc.
- Donate spare sporting and entertainment tickets to a community agency for a fundraising event or as a treat for children and youth.



“Our members believe in the ‘hand up, not a hand out’ approach of Habitat and are proud to help build homes with low-income partner families. It gives everyone involved a great sense of gratification to be able to point to something like this that’s bricks and mortar and drywall to say you know we were a part of the success of building this home with these people.”

*Mike Dennis, President, Moen Inc.,
Chairman, Canadian Institute for Plumbing and Heating.*

Habitat for Humanity

Habitat for Humanity Canada (www.habitat.ca) is a non-profit faith-based organization working with local affiliates. It creates simple, decent and affordable housing solutions by bringing communities together in partnership with volunteers, donors and low-income families. One example of how the corporate sector has gotten involved is the **Canadian Institute for Plumbing and Heating (CIPH)**. Since 1994, hundreds of member companies and their employees have contributed more than \$2.5 million in products and financial aid, as well as thousands of volunteer hours, to build Habitat homes across Canada.

“Our members believe in the ‘hand up, not a hand out’ approach of Habitat and are proud to help build homes with low-income partner families,” said **Mike Dennis, President, Moen Inc., Chairman, Canadian Institute for Plumbing and Heating**. “It gives everyone involved a great sense of gratification to be able to point to something like this that’s bricks and mortar and drywall to say you know we were a part of the success of building this home with these people.”



“To the families helped by Habitat for Humanity, a shiny new key to their new home can seem like precious metal – capable of opening the door to a new future full of hope and opportunity,” commented **David W. Hughes, President and Chief Executive Officer, Habitat for Humanity Canada**. “It is such keys, cut from the generosity of volunteers across Canada, that are making all the difference for families who are trying to break the seemingly endless cycle of poverty.”



“When I joined Eva’s board last year, I was amazed at the opportunities board service held. In addition to the rewarding opportunity to make a difference, I have learned so much about leadership at the highest level. I realize that for organizations, both in the corporate and charitable worlds, having good leadership is more critical now than ever before. Without BoardMatch, I would not have realized the value, both personally and for my career, in joining a board.”

*Megan Telford
Labour and Employment Lawyer*

BoardMatch® Fundamentals

BoardMatch® Fundamentals (BMF) (www.boardmatch.org), a program of Altruvest Charitable Services, is an innovative, online program which introduces registered charities to enthusiastic and informed candidates willing to share their expertise by serving as members of the boards of charitable organizations. BMF takes a proactive approach with corporations, professional associations and community groups to inform their employees and members about the voluntary sector and opportunities in board service.

Sol Kasimer, Chief Executive Officer of Altruvest Charitable Services expresses it clearly. “The

reality is that the only way private sector professionals are going to understand governance is through experience on a board. And it makes them better leaders when they return to their jobs.”

Last year through BoardMatch Fundamentals, **Megan Telford, a labour and employment lawyer**, teamed up with **Eva’s Initiatives**, a new project that helps homeless and at-risk youth. Eva’s needed a director with collective bargaining experience, so the board-match was a natural fit. Each year, Eva’s Initiatives helps over 2,300 homeless and at-risk youth to get off the street, find housing and community supports, and begin to rebuild their futures.



“When I joined Eva’s board last year, I was amazed at the opportunities board service held. In addition to the rewarding opportunity to make a difference, I have learned so much about leadership at the highest level. I realize that for organizations, both in the corporate and charitable worlds, having good leadership is more critical now than ever before. Without BoardMatch, I would not have realized the value, both personally and for my career, in joining a board,” comments Megan.

Management

If you are responsible for some of the following activities, this section outlines a number of ways you can get involved in helping to develop solutions to homelessness as part of everyday activities:

- Strategic planning to ensure the organization meets stated objectives and outcomes.
- Assessing group dynamics and managing and motivating individuals to achieve collective objectives.
- Supporting staff development for individual and organizational benefit through performance reviews/appraisals and learning plans.
- Fostering opportunities for staff to be creative and engaged in the decision making process about the future direction of the organization.
- Problem solving.



Here are some suggestions on how you can strengthen your leadership skills and gain an appreciation of different management styles and situations:

- As a volunteer consider becoming a member of an advisory board for a community agency that supports homeless people or those at-risk.
- Volunteer with the Community Advisory Boards working with the NHI (refer to page 21).
- As a member of a business or professional association, encourage the organization to consider its role in addressing homelessness.
- Be a champion with peers and colleagues about what they can do to help address homelessness.
- Support annual public awareness and fundraising activities, e.g. a walk-a-thon for a local women's shelter.
- Encourage staff to make suggestions on your company's community investment programming.
- As part of your company's community investment programming, provide funding to organizations where employees volunteer.

Financial and administrative services

If you are responsible for some of the following activities, this section outlines a number of ways you can get involved in helping to develop solutions to homelessness as part of everyday activities:

- Make recommendations on expenditures based on available cash flow.
- Manage contracts for goods and services tendered.
- Prepare invoices and payments.
- Financial reporting.
- Make travel arrangements and provide administrative support to teams within the organization.

Here are some suggestions on how to strengthen individual skills as well as gain loyalty within your networks:

- Volunteer as a fundraiser – your contacts would make you an important asset to any community group.
- Encourage suppliers/contractors to consider how their expertise may be of use to community agencies.
- Contract routine services with a community organization where the profits are reinvested into programs that help homeless people, e.g. photocopying services, catering, landscaping.
- Advocate to other contracting colleagues the value of investing in community organizations with social purpose enterprises.

Did you know?

55% of Canadians decided to buy a product from one company over another because it was a good corporate citizen.

55%

Another **52%** refused because the business was not socially responsible.

52%

Ipsos-Reid, 2003

“Every business uses office supplies, couriers, catering, promotional materials, and similar goods and services in our daily activities. We are already spending the money to purchase these everyday products and services... using the Social Purchasing Portal we get both the business value and contribute back to the community. The SPP is corporate social responsibility in daily business activities without added cost.”

*George Brown,
Chief Executive Officer, SalesWorks*

“Our increased catering business generated by the Social Purchasing Portal purchasers has really helped to grow our business, and created full time jobs for six former youth at-risk.”

*James Kennedy,
owner of Cook Studio Catering*

Social Purchasing Portal

The Social Purchasing Portal (SPP) Web site facilitates business purchases from participating suppliers who blend a business value of price, quality and service, with a social value, such as employment opportunities for hard-to-employ persons, including individuals and families who are at risk of homelessness.

“Every business uses office supplies, couriers, catering, promotional materials, and similar goods and services in our daily activities. We are already spending the money to purchase these everyday products and services... using the Social Purchasing Portal we get both the business value and contribute back to the community. The SPP is corporate social responsibility in daily business activities without added cost.” **George Brown, Chief Executive Officer, SalesWorks, a participating purchaser.**

The more SPP purchasers buy from participating suppliers, the more these businesses grow and create employment opportunities. The SPP creates a social value built upon a demand-based business model, not a charity model.

James Kennedy, owner of Cook Studio Catering, SPP supplier adds: “Our increased catering business generated by the Social Purchasing Portal purchasers has really helped to grow our business, and created full time jobs for six former youth at-risk.”

The Social Purchasing Portal is operating in Vancouver, Toronto and Winnipeg and soon in other cities – www.sppcanada.org.

*“At no cost to the local food banks or participating collection sites, the **thINK FOOD** project has generated the equivalent of 250,000 lbs of food for hundreds of communities across the country.”*

Charles Seiden, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Food Banks.

thINK FOOD / Phones-for-Food

thINK FOOD / Phones-for-Food

(www.think-food.com), is an award-winning, multi-partner, environmental fundraiser for food banks that involves the collection and recycling of used printer cartridges and cell phones. The double impact is meaningful: new resources for alleviating hunger and less waste in the landfill. Each item can be worth as much as a

jar of peanut butter or a carton of milk! There are thousands of participating collection sites. National Sponsors include **Petro-Canada, Purolator and Rogers Wireless.**

“At no cost to the local food banks or participating collection sites, the thINK FOOD project has generated the equivalent of 250,000 lbs of food for hundreds of communities across the country,” noted **Charles Seiden, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Food Banks.**

“thINK FOOD offers exceptionally good opportunities to the corporate sector to engage employees and customers in recycling printer cartridges and cell phones,” praised **Hazel Gillespie, National Community Investment Manager, Petro-Canada.** “Protecting and preserving the environment is a strong passion for many and being able to help the environment, while also contributing to food banks across Canada, is a very powerful incentive. The thINK FOOD staff are talented, well organized and skilful in carrying out their mission and passion. It’s been a very rewarding partnership for us and we highly encourage other companies to get involved.”



Office and building management

If you are responsible for some of the following activities, this section outlines a number of ways you can get involved in helping to develop solutions to homelessness as part of everyday activities:

- Ensure staff have access to safe office equipment, e.g. computers and furniture, and make recommendations on upgrades for greater efficiency and safety.
- Coordinate servicing of equipment in a timely manner.
- Purchase stationary and other required supplies.
- Manage building maintenance.
- Capital Development Advice.

Here are some suggestions on effective ways to manage resources that provide a positive social gain to the company and community:

- Consider creative ways to recycle technological resources when they become obsolete, e.g. donate computers, telephones, printer ink cartridges to organizations where proceeds from refurbishment are reinvested in the community and helps individuals to develop skills.
- Donate excess furniture to families moving into temporary, transitional housing.
- Share your skills and experience with a shelter that has limited resources, e.g. how to gain cost savings from effective techniques of resource management.
- Offer the use of unused storage space to allow community agencies to help homeless people safely secure their few valuables.
- Allow community organizations to use your boardrooms when possible, and include laptops, projectors and other meeting resources.

Professional services

If you are responsible for some of the following activities, this section outlines a number of ways you can get involved in helping to develop solutions to homelessness as part of everyday activities:

- Legal advice
- Communications, public relations, marketing
- Information Technology support, Web development
- Accounting services



By using your skills to help a community organization serving homeless people, you will gain insight that will help to strengthen your abilities in your job:

- Donate specialized services to community agencies, e.g. improve accounting or computer systems, provide legal advice.
- Offer workshops on your specialized skill to enhance the capacity of groups.
- Offer to develop a Web site or provide free maintenance, graphic design, or presentations.
- Participate in tutoring programs, e.g. math clubs, reading circles.
- Cause-related marketing – if your company makes the commitment to support agencies serving homeless people, produce communication products that reflect the benefits to company, homeless people and the community.
- Provide in-kind advice to support an awareness campaign to help organizations challenge myths and stereotypes of homelessness.

Refuge La Piaule de Drummondville

The contributions made by professionals as part of the project to renovate and develop a community centre for socially estranged young people in Drummondville was a determining factor in the project's success.

Refuge la Piaule du Centre du Québec, faced with a task beyond its capabilities, was able to take advantage of the assistance of an advisory team made up of architects, engineers, notaries, financial advisors, construction contractors, property managers and so on, who, for the most part, were members of the **Drummondville Rotary Club**.

According to **Jean-Marie Richard, Coordinator of Refuge la Piaule**, "The committee members' expertise made it possible for the organization to complete a project that was thoroughly analyzed at every stage of its development."

The members' heightened awareness of the realities faced by homeless and socially estranged young people also made it possible to rally a number of community members and partners around a project that proved to be ambitious and challenging, but which was ideally suited to the particular needs of those young people.

Jean-Guy Roy, Drummondville Canadian Tire owner, Rotary Member and Chairperson of the advisory committee for the project to develop the Centre Multi-Arts with Refuge la Piaule du Centre du Québec, said, "Contributing to this project was both a satisfactory and inspiring experience, resulting in a great sense of pride and the profound feeling of having accomplished something important for the community."

A snapshot of homelessness in Canada

Homelessness is everywhere in Canada: not just in big cities. There are currently 61 communities across the country where the challenge of homelessness is most severe: these communities range in size from Iqaluit (7,000) to Red Deer (72,600) to Toronto (2.4 million).

There are people who are visibly homeless who are on the streets, but there are many more who are considered to be the “invisible homeless”. These are people who are living in shelters; have a place to stay temporarily by the grace of family and friends; or those who are in unsafe living environments (e.g. victims of family abuse) who could end-up on the streets should they have to leave their current situation.

Given the above understanding of homelessness, it is easier to appreciate how it is difficult to count the exact number of homeless people. Findings from research and local “street and shelter counts” suggest that, at a minimum, approximately .5% of the population in any given Canadian community will be homeless.

This means that there are currently about 150,000 homeless people in Canada. This estimate does not include those living in over-crowded/ sub-standard conditions.

It is important to note that since the beginning of the NHI communities have created approximately 10,000 new, permanent places in shelters, transitional and supportive houses. In the 61 communities that are addressing the most pressing instances of homelessness in Canada, this effort helps to ensure that anyone in need of a bed to sleep in at night has access to one. However, many of these community organizations do not have the capacity to host homeless people throughout the day therefore many people are left to the streets until shelter doors are able to open again.

Knowing more about those who are homeless and at-risk of becoming homeless might assist you in considering how you and



Did you know?

80%

Over **80%** of Canadians stated they are concerned about homelessness.

Pollara 2002

your organization can help to be part of the solution in the communities where you live and work. The following groups are represented in the homeless and at-risk populations:

- Working poor
- Persons with mental health issues
- Youth, women and elders fleeing from family abuse
- Aboriginal people
- Immigrants and refugees

The pathways into homelessness are as varied as the people themselves. Many low-income Canadians spend their lives knowing that they are “only one paycheck away from being homeless”. Catastrophic events, such as an illness, fires and floods, family breakdown, or job loss often results in temporary homelessness. This type of “episodic homelessness” may last for a few months to a year, but eventually most are able to re-establish their lives.

The lack of access to clean, safe, affordable housing has increasingly forced people into homelessness. Indeed, many of people living in homeless shelters maintain full-or part-time employment, yet cannot afford a home of their own. Data from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation indicates that, in 2001, there were 1.7 million or 15.8% households who were in “core housing need”. This means that half of these low-income Canadians are spending more than 50% of their pre-tax income on shelter costs.

For an estimated 20%-30% of the Canadian homeless population, the pathway to homelessness has been a long, slow descent over many years. Often, they have chronic/debilitating conditions, such as: severe mental health problems; gambling or drug and alcohol addictions. For others still, their homelessness can be attributed, in large part, to experiences with persistent exclusion/prejudice, or significant lack of schooling and employment skills. This type of “chronic homelessness” is often experienced over long periods of time with many repeat occurrences over the course of their life.

If you are interested in learning more about homelessness in Canada, please visit www.homelessness.gc.ca.



Business leadership in solutions to homelessness

Many companies already make a significant contribution to addressing homelessness through their philanthropic programs as well as part of their core business practices. Some provide supports to women fleeing from abusive situations, others offer supports that help marginalized and disadvantaged youth achieve their potential. Some trades and construction companies encourage individuals to develop skills that will help them become self-reliant, while others help to ensure that families in need have access to supports which help to prevent them from becoming homeless. **Without the resources and supports provided through the corporate sector, far more individuals and families would be at risk of homelessness.**

Often these programs and supports are not named as supports for homelessness, but simply referred to as programs for “at-risk” populations or “those in need”. By clearly identifying the contributions made by the corporate sector, in conjunction with the voluntary and public sectors, we can build on this and make a deeper impact on homelessness in Canada.

There are numerous community organizations working locally, regionally and nationally in a variety of ways to respond to the needs of individuals and families. Linking with these organizations will provide a number of ways to help homeless persons. Refer to the private sector involvement section to learn more about community efforts being made.

Community-driven delivery model

The homeless population in urban and rural centres in Canada has, over the past decade, been growing in both size and diversity. In 1999, regional, national and international organizations all called upon the Government of Canada to join with other partners and to take immediate action on the issue.

Consultations with service providers and homeless people identified many existing programs and resources available to homeless people through government and community organizations. However, the system was fragmented and uncoordinated and, as a result, left many gaps in necessary services. It was also apparent that although homelessness existed across the country, the challenges associated with it were quite different from one community to another.

The Government of Canada's response was the NHI and its cornerstone program, the SCPI. This program supports a coordinated response at the community level and recognizes that a local approach to addressing homelessness works best.

Community planning process

Under the auspices of SCPI, organizations interested in developing solutions to homelessness have come together to identify assets and gaps to address homelessness in their community. This new governance model brings together a collective of key stakeholders into a local community planning group which is often referred to as the Community Advisory Board (or steering committee, action committee, governance committee). Typically, this group includes representatives from local community organizations and various levels of government. Youth and Aboriginal people, as significant and growing homeless subpopulations, are often included in the planning tables.

Through this consultative process the community plan is written to identify local priorities. These plans help community agencies to focus their attention on what supports are most needed to help address homelessness among individuals and families to provide longer-term solutions to the problem.



Community leadership in decision making

This new governance model has been a success. It has resulted in local community mobilization and enhanced partnership among all stakeholders including key groups at risk of homelessness. The SCPI model has enabled community organizations, governments and the private sector to better coordinate their efforts and, as a result, to secure additional financial and human resources for solutions to homelessness.

The SCPI was selected as a Best Practice by the United Nations Habitat 2002 Dubai International Awards for Best Practices. UN-Habitat Best Practices, such as the SCPI, are initiatives which have made outstanding contributions to improving the quality of life in cities and communities around the world. For the 2002 Awards, an independent committee was responsible for reviewing the 544 submissions, of which the Government of Canada's Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative was identified as one of four North American submissions recognized as a Best Practice.

In the first three years (1999-2003) of the Initiative, community plans were developed in 61 large communities across the country representing 75% of the population. At this time a main priority for many communities was supporting emergency measures to respond to urgent needs of their homeless population.

In March 2003, the SCPI was extended with an additional \$257 million in funding over three years, to build on and enhance community successes.

Communities have assessed the progress made to date against their original plans, identified further supports needed to help homeless people, and updated their plans to reflect changing priorities. As a result of consultations with stakeholders and partners, many communities are moving from emergency supports to developing transitional and supportive housing interventions to create more stable living environments and supports for homeless people.

To date, the Government of Canada has committed over \$1.15 billion over six years to the NHI.

Private sector involvement



Along with municipal, provincial and territorial governments, the private sector has contributed significant resources, both financial and in-kind, to help community agencies support homeless people.

Building on their positive experiences of working collaboratively to develop solutions to homelessness, communities are expanding their efforts to further engage the corporate and non-governmental sectors. **Community Advisory Boards can help provide strategic support to determine where corporate sector contributions can make the greatest impact.**

Community Advisory Boards can also help to identify a number of ways that your company can get involved in developing solutions to homelessness. This support helps to improve not only the lives of some of the most vulnerable Canadians, but strengthens the overall well-being of the communities where your employees live and work.



Did you know?

Corporate social responsibility is positively related to better financial performance and this relationship is statistically significant... socially responsible corporate performance can be associated with a series of bottom-line benefits.

*Haas School of Business,
University of California at
Berkeley, 2004*



Over 40 simple ways you can help homeless people

Volunteer

As an individual

- Provide mentorship for homeless individuals for job skills training, e.g. resume writing, interview coaching.
- Encourage employees to volunteer with community organizations as an opportunity for personal skill development.
- Volunteer on advisory boards for community agencies that support homeless people or those at-risk.
- Volunteer with the Community Advisory Boards working with the NHI (Refer to page 21).
- Share your skills and experience with a shelter that has limited resources, e.g. how to gain cost savings from effective techniques of resource management.
- Volunteer as a fundraiser – your contacts would make you an important asset to any community group.
- Donate specialized services to community agencies, e.g. improve accounting or computer systems, provide legal or capital development advice.
- Offer workshops on your specialized skill to enhance the capacity of groups.
- Develop a Web site or offer free maintenance, graphic design, presentations.
- Participate in tutoring programs, e.g. math clubs, reading circles.

As an organization

- Connect with local Community Advisory Boards for the NHI to help determine where your financial contribution can make the greatest impact (refer to page 21).
- Foster a company policy that allows employees paid days for volunteerism.
- Organize workshops to connect employees with community groups helping both to develop different capacities and to learn from each other.
- Volunteer with an organization that builds houses for families, e.g. a one-day build with Habitat for Humanity.
- Cause-related marketing – if your company makes the commitment to support agencies serving homeless people, produce communication products that reflect the benefits to the company, homeless people and the community.



Give

As an individual

- Sort and distribute donated clothing, shoes or other necessities.
- Support families moving out of emergency shelter by donating old household items (e.g. furniture) and offering to help them move.
- Create “start-up kits” for families moving into transitional facilities, including cleaning products, kitchen supplies, etc.
- Donate spare sporting and entertainment tickets to a community agency for a fundraising event or as a treat for children and youth.

As an organization

- Propose that your company consider developing a community investment fund that supports homeless people.
- Link your company's community investment funding with a foundation that supports similar activities.
- Create a funding network with a number of corporate partners to cluster your community investment.
- Contract routine services with a community organization where the profits are reinvested in programs that help homeless people, e.g. photocopying services, catering, landscaping.
- As team-building exercises, pick up food, cook and serve a meal at a local shelter or coordinate activities and deliver items for a food or toy drive.
- For employee payroll giving programs, recognize homeless service agencies as potential recipients.
- Donate resources and help to renovate a local community facility, e.g. paint day care facility or plant a community garden.
- As a staff event, host a fundraising activity.
- During the holidays, host a party at a local shelter and hold your company gift exchange for children living there.
- As part of your company's community investment programming, provide funding to organizations where your employees volunteer.
- Consider creative ways to recycle technological resources when they become obsolete, e.g. donate computers, telephones, printer ink cartridges to organizations where proceeds from refurbishment are reinvested in the community and help individuals to develop skills.
- Donate excess furniture to families moving into temporary, transitional housing.
- Offer the use of unused storage space to allow community agencies to help homeless people safely secure their few valuables.
- Allow community organizations to use your boardrooms when possible, and include laptops, projectors and other meeting resources.



Educate / Advocate

As an individual

- Educate others about the SCPI community planning process and how it is beneficial for making decisions related to philanthropic programs (refer to page 21).
- As a member of a business or professional association, encourage the organization to consider its role in addressing homelessness.
- Be a champion with peers and colleagues about what they can do to help address homelessness.
- Encourage suppliers/contractors to consider how their expertise may be of use to community agencies.
- Advocate to other contracting colleagues the value of investing in community organizations with social purpose enterprises.
- Provide in-kind advice to support an awareness campaign to help organizations challenge myths and stereotypes of homelessness.

As an organization

- Develop support guidelines for your company's philanthropy application to help community groups better understand your company's selection criteria.
- Encourage corporate peers within your sector to consider how collectively you can make an impact on homelessness.
- Encourage your company to consider hiring individuals through employment training programs.
- Support annual public awareness and fundraising activities, e.g. a walk-a-thon for a local women's shelter.
- Encourage staff to make suggestions on your company's community investment programming.

Get Connected

Every organization and individual has knowledge, expertise and resources that can go a long way in helping to address homelessness. The contacts listed below can help you turn your interest in wanting to address homelessness into action.

National Contacts

National Secretariat on Homelessness
Web address: www.homelessness.gc.ca
Telephone number: 1-800-O-Canada