

A Success Story

Maison d'hébergement et de dépannage de Valleyfield Valleyfield, Quebec

Maison d'hébergement et de dépannage de Valleyfield (MHDV): rediscovering self-respect

In Valleyfield, the Maison d'hébergement et de dépannage (MHDV) is more than a place for homeless persons to get a hot meal and a bed. It works hand in hand with homeless persons to help them reintegrate into society and become independent. Its recipe for active participation has enabled many people in the region to rediscover their self-respect.

"Reducing homelessness means helping each person get his or her life back and find solid ground in society," says André Couillard, Co-ordinator of the MHDV. Established in 1984, the MHDV has helped more than 4,000 people and has sheltered over 400 homeless persons over the last 20 years. It was originally founded to help men in difficulty, but in 2000, it opened its doors to homeless women also who were unable to find room at the women's shelter in Valleyfield.

The MHDV has a highly diverse clientele. It welcomes men and women aged 18 to more than 70, who have various addictions, the most frequent being alcohol, drugs and gambling. "In recent years, we have seen a sharp increase in the number of compulsive gamblers, both men and women, and they are often elderly people. These clienteles are not usually at risk of becoming homeless at first. They often come from middle-class backgrounds, which is a relatively new phenomenon that requires different solutions," explains the Co-ordinator.

Innovation: a viable solution

What distinguishes the MHDV from many centres providing assistance for homeless persons is its innovative approach in having its clients play an active role. "We are not a rooming house or a shelter. We are aiming for long-term reintegration. We want our clients to make their come-back in society a life project and we want them to find their own places and start living normal lives," explains André Couillard.

To achieve this, the MHDV offers a program that includes short-term accommodations for one to seven days and longer stays of up to six months. The first seven days are free, but after that, residents must pay a few dollars (usually \$7 to \$9 a day). For a stay longer than three months at the MHDV, they get a \$3 refund for each day they spent there when they move to their own apartment. That money is used to buy what they need for their basic comfort: bed linens, dishes, furniture and so on. "In this way, our clients have to take concrete action to find decent lodgings that will help them live normal lives again, as opposed to finding temporary rooms, which are often fertile ground for relapses."

During their stays, residents work with the staff at the MHDV to try to solve the problems that led to their homelessness. "These problems are often what lie behind their addictions. We want to tackle the underlying causes and help people reorganize their lives."

The MHDV's program has five components: identifying the problem, helping clients tackle their financial problems (obtain identification papers, open a bank account, etc), discussing training and employment, providing them with what they need to settle down and, once they have moved to their new homes, following up on them through sponsors and by other means. The goal is to set them on

the path towards a balanced life, with their own address, a job and a sense of pride for contributing to society.

The NHI* for expansion... and much more

The government's \$288,801 contribution under the youth component of the NHI* has enabled the expansion of MHDV, the addition of nine beds to its existing nine, and taking a big step forward in accomplishing its mission of social reintegration. "In addition to sheltering a greater number of people, we have been able to implement a program for planning their stays, which involves more than just shelter," explains André Couillard. "We now have programs that range from a few days to a year, which enables us to follow up on our clients until they become completely independent."

Planning a future

In addition to helping its clients find decent lodging, the MHDV literally teaches them how to live again. Many of these people have been on their own for months before deciding to get help. "Thanks to the extra staff we now have, it is easier to implement sustainable solutions for our clientele," says the Co-ordinator. There is an immense need, but the MHDV's long-term approach makes it possible to work in a tangible way towards solving problems of homelessness in Valleyfield.

by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

June 2005

*NHI: National Homelessness Initiative