

**Project Case Study
Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness
Barrie, Ontario**

1. Introduction

This case study of the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness is one of a series of case studies of projects funded at least in part through the federal government's National Homelessness Initiative (NHI). The case study first describes the project including: conditions prior to implementation, what the project involves and its objectives. It then describes project implementation to date. Finally, it notes outcomes to date, including comments from clients where available.

Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) is producing these case studies in order to contribute to the government's understanding of how NHI is working in individual communities at the project level, to gauge the extent to which the objectives are being achieved at this mid-way stage of the three-year Initiative, and to determine what can be learned from the experiences of particular projects that may be applicable to others participating in the Initiative.

The case study is based on a review of the initial proposal for the project and other available documents describing the project and its objectives and how it fits into the community's plans to address homelessness, and on a series of interviews with people representing the following groups:

- managers and staff of the project
- community organizations working in areas related to this project that might share clientele with the project or whose service to people who are homeless might be influenced by this project

2. Description of the Project

Conditions prior to project implementation

Prior to 1998, the community did not have a co-ordinated strategy to address homelessness. Services for homeless persons were isolated and disorganized. In isolation, communities did their best to respond to the requests of local residents at risk of homelessness and those of homeless persons seeking help. For example, in Barrie, the Salvation Army offered refuge to homeless men in an older facility that was eventually abandoned for newer facilities renovated with the financial assistance of CMHC. The Elizabeth Fry Society also housed homeless women released from correctional institutions in the area. The Women and Children's Shelter served victims of domestic violence and the David Busby Street Centre opened its doors on weekdays to the city's homeless. Finally, the church community sponsored the Out of the Cold program in Barrie.

The city of Orillia, the second largest urban centre in Simcoe County, delivered services to the homeless with the help of its local food bank and soup kitchen, the Green Haven shelter for women, the Lighthouse Christian Ministries shelter for men and a number of support services like New Path, Catalpa Tamarac and Interval Muskoka. In Collingwood, the Salvation Army operated a small homeless shelter until 1995 when it shut down due to financial strains. In Midland, the local Salvation Army provided vouchers for temporary stays in local motels, but more often, the homeless were directed to the city of Barrie for assistance. In New Tecumseth, the province supported the activities of the local shelter for women victims of domestic violence and, as in Midland, homeless men and women were advised to go to the city.

Observations about the precarious nature of services for the homeless in the county led to a pressing desire to develop a co-ordinated response to the issue and resulted in the establishment of the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH) in 1998. The year prior to its inception, a number of staff from social services agencies in the county approached the Executive Director of the United Way to talk about homelessness. The discussions resulted in the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness.

SCATEH was formed as a result of community leaders' determination to reach out beyond the boundaries of Barrie to include all of the county's communities in a plan to deal with the issue. This action resulted in the creation of chapters in the cities of Orillia and the towns of Collingwood, Midland and New Tecumseth. Over 70 member agencies have contributed to SCATEH's goal of developing strategies to deal with homelessness since the committee's expansion.

Since 1998, the SCATEH co-ordinator has helped to create links among the different stakeholders in the county. She continues to provide information and support to SCATEH's membership and works to develop strategies to put into action the Alliance's goals of advocacy, research, resourcing and co-ordination. In addition, she assists community groups to access the different funding envelopes available from the province's Ministry of Community and Social Services for activities to address homelessness. She and her assistants search for other sources of funding for homelessness as well, on an on-going basis.

What the project involves

In the early stages of the NHI initiative in Barrie, local HRDC officials participated in discussions with members of SCATEH and the United Way of Greater Simcoe County to determine a scheme to administer the initiative. Consultations led to the decision to appoint SCATEH as the community entity, but this body was not incorporated, and so the United Way was invited to share the responsibility. Further discussions led to an agreement between SCATEH and the United Way. The agreement stipulated that the United Way would assume all the duties of administering the initiative. This allowed SCATEH to concentrate on the co-ordination of activities to address homelessness in the whole county.

Once the partners' roles were clarified, the United Way was awarded the portion of the SCPI funding set aside for administration. SCATEH remained detached from this responsibility. This permitted the leadership of SCATEH to apply for SCPI project funding (the Supporting Communities Partnerships Initiative is the primary funding program of the NHI) in order to assure its functioning as its other source of funding, the County of Simcoe, remained tenuous. SCATEH's supporters were anxious to secure funds for this entity as it was perceived as essential to the success of the initiative in Barrie. SCATEH's staff is headquartered in office space contributed by the local Canadian Mental Health Association branch.

The SCATEH co-ordinator played a pivotal role in the development of the SCPI initiative in Barrie. She was instrumental in supporting the activities associated with the development of both the city of Barrie's and the County of Simcoe's community plans to address homelessness. As a result, smaller communities like those identified earlier were able to participate in the community plan and their role in the planning resulted in a much broader recognition of the gaps and priorities that exist throughout the county. The challenge for those communities will be to address those priorities in their section of the county. The campaign to deal with this challenge is on-going.

Objectives of the project

SCATEH's goals are:

1. To increase public awareness of the impact of homelessness on the community and of the determination to end it;
2. To increase the level of understanding of the changing nature and causes of homelessness;
3. To create intervention and prevention strategies to end homelessness;
4. To advocate for the implementation of the strategies developed by SCATEH.

SCATEH's ultimate goal is to eliminate homelessness altogether in Simcoe county and its activists are determined to achieve this goal.

3. Implementation to Date

The injection of SCPI funding into SCATEH's assets has guaranteed its operations until March 2003. The funding has also provided more time for staff to search for alternative funding sources to assure SCATEH's sustainability beyond 2003. The funds are also helping to increase the capacity in the county to plan for homelessness into the future. Activities include research, data collection and substantiating the costs of providing various forms of shelter, from emergency refuge to transitional options. They also encompass searching for other sources of investment in homelessness activities. Finally, they include developing strategies to improve the co-ordination of efforts to address homelessness in all its manifestations.

The community can already identify some progress in its mission to address homelessness. For example, community-planning activities beyond the boundaries of the city of Barrie have increased the level of awareness and education about the issue, county wide. The forums held in Orillia, Collingwood, Midland and New Tecumseth drew a large audience that included local politicians, many church groups, and social and community services. In some communities, community planning helped to mobilize volunteer groups to participate in the planning activities.

In addition, SCPI funds are maintaining SCATEH co-ordinator's efforts at encouraging its local chapters to play a more substantial role in the development of future strategies to address the issue.

4. Outcomes to Date

Preliminary observations

While it is premature to make any assessment of the impacts of the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness on the lives of its many clients in the longer term, it is possible to make the following preliminary observations:

In the opinions of the many members of the Barrie service community with whom we consulted, and those from the smaller local chapters of SCATEH, this community group is having a valuable impact on Simcoe County. Representatives of SCATEH's member agencies from Barrie and from border municipalities shared the following observations:

- The decision to allocate SCPI dollars only to the city of Barrie opened the door to the leadership of SCATEH to recommend that a greater share of available provincial homelessness funding be allocated to the communities that participated in the development of community planning for homelessness in the county. This allowed members in Collingwood to increase support for the activities of its local Housing Resource Centre. In Midland, provincial funds were used to hire a housing placement worker to help homeless persons to secure housing and assist those at risk of homelessness to hold on to their housing. In New Tecumseth, Ministry funds were used to secure office space for the community's homelessness worker.
- Membership in the Alliance has reportedly led to an increased level of awareness about homelessness in the greater region. Although activities to address the issue are in their infancy in border communities, member agencies hope that SCATEH's continued efforts will result in more services and supports for the homeless in their particular areas.
- Membership has also encouraged more networking and information sharing among agencies that serve the homeless throughout the county. Members recognize that more work needs to be done as activities to deal with the issue tend to be concentrated in Barrie, the county's major urban centre.
- The Alliance has reportedly been a major factor in augmenting the number of referrals that agency members make to each other on behalf of, and to the benefit of, homeless clients.
- Chapter members shared their great satisfaction with the performance of SCATEH's staff. The co-ordinator and those who support her are available for advice, information and support on a regular basis. SCATEH's staff has contributed to the research and

data gathering tasks that have already begun in the community to better understand homelessness in the county.

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