

Community Case Study Charlottetown and Summerside, Prince Edward Island

1. Introduction

This case study of Charlottetown and Summerside is one of a series of case studies of communities participating in the federal government's National Homelessness Initiative (NHI). The case study first outlines community action related to homelessness prior to federal government initiative. It then describes the planning and implementation structure the community put in place to respond to the NHI and lists projects undertaken to date. Finally, it notes some of the unique issues related to homelessness observed in the community and some of the lessons the community learned that could be useful to other communities responding to the NHI or a similar federal initiative.

Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) is producing the case studies in order to contribute to the government's understanding of how NHI is working at the community level and the extent to which the objectives are being achieved at this mid-way stage of the three-year initiative. Communities will thus have an overview of what is being done in their community and of what can be learned from the experiences in individual communities that may be applicable to others participating in the Initiative.

The case study is based on a review of Charlottetown and Summerside's homelessness plan and other documents and reports relating to homelessness and a series of interviews with people representing the following groups (a complete list of the groups is attached to this report):

- local HRDC homelessness managers and staff
- provincial and municipal government officials in related program areas
- community planning steering committee and sub-committees
- community organizations active in service delivery for homeless persons and people at risk

Information from the community case studies done across Canada will be compiled with data on projects being funded and other information to give HRDC a national perspective on how the Initiative is working to date.

2. Homelessness Activities Prior to the Federal Government Initiative

Extent of overall activity, programs, facilities

In every community across Canada, charitable organizations, faith-based and non-profit agencies have actively served impoverished and homeless Canadians for decades and, in some cases, longer than a century. In PEI, long-standing agencies such as the Salvation Army continue to provide refuge to homeless individuals in the province's two major urban centres, Charlottetown and Summerside.

In most cases, agency staff lodges its clients in motel rooms for two or three days until they can access social services for financial assistance. For the past 30 years, the Charlottetown Christian Council, a coalition of churches, has provided for the needs of this population. The St. Vincent de Paul societies also offer support, often in the form of food, clothing and other provisions on an on-going basis.

The Upper Room, a church-based organization, opened a soup kitchen in 1984 and a food bank in 1986 in Charlottetown. The Bedford McDonald Trust operated a shelter for men from 1991 to 1997, when funding constraints forced it to close. In Summerside, the local Salvation Army has a Thrift store and a food bank, and offers furniture and provisions to persons in need in the community.

Community planning

Prior to the NHI, a small number of community services were preoccupied with homelessness. Other than the existing social services and the efforts described above, agencies serving the homeless were, on the whole, working independently of each other.

Involvement by federal, provincial and municipal governments

CMHC has been a major player in the development of housing programs in PEI since the early 1950s, sharing with its provincial counterpart the cost of the RAPP program as well as non-profit and Co-op Housing programs. In partnership with CMHC, the PEI Housing Corporation continued to cost-share the building of social housing and housing for seniors until 1993 when the federal government stopped funding new social housing. At the present time, the only remaining federal-provincial funding agreement in PEI is the RAPP program. The federal government's share of expenditures is 75 percent and the provincial share is 25 percent.

The provincial government has funds facilities such as Deacon House and Talbot House, addiction facilities that provide support to men with substance abuse problems, as well as Lacey House for women with substance abuse problems. The province also funds Anderson House in the city of Charlottetown, a facility for women victims of domestic violence.

3. How Charlottetown and Summerside Have Responded to the Federal Government Initiative

Initial work by HRDC

The province of Prince Edward Island is made up of three regional jurisdictions — King's, Queen's and Prince Counties. The province's two major urban centres, Charlottetown, capital of the province in Queen's County and the city of Summerside, in Prince County, participated in the federal Initiative.

When the NHI was announced nationally, local HRDC officials convened a community meeting in August of 1999 to announce the initiative locally and provide available details. More than 35 agencies responded to the invitation.

After the preliminary meeting, interested parties met again to form an advisory committee to decide how to implement the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), which is the primary funding program under the NHI. The committee moved quickly to kick-start the community planning process, which is a requirement in order for participating communities to obtain the funding they have been allocated. In the early stages of the process, committee members and HRDC officers selected the Board of the Bedford McDonald Trust as the community entity to administer the SCPI funds for Charlottetown and Summerside. The chair of the advisory committee was invited to step down in order to assume the role of community coordinator for the homelessness initiative. The local HRDC office maintained responsibility for administering the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) and youth homelessness funds—two other funding streams under the NHI.

Community planning process

Once the advisory committee's mandate was established, its first step was to apply for SCPI funds to hire a consultant to research the issue. Over a period of several months, the consulting group gathered information about homelessness in the area. The researchers consulted with agencies in both communities as well as homeless persons. The following organizations are represented in the community planning process:

Overall Community Planning (Fall 2000)

- 2 municipal groups
- 5 provincial groups
- 3 federal groups
- 4 community groups
- 26 community agencies

Community Advisory Committee and Selection Committee

- 2 municipal groups
- 1 provincial group
- 2 federal groups

- 6 community agencies
- 3 community groups

The community planning process included an initial meeting to formalize the community planning process. The consultants presented their preliminary findings during a community forum held in each community. At the forums, participants were encouraged to ask questions and make recommendations for further research. Using the recommendations from the forums, the consultants completed their research and presented the data along with recommended priorities to the members of the advisory committee and, soon afterwards, to the greater community in a second round of community forums in both communities. Advisory committee members and the community as a whole adopted these priorities.

After much discussion, advisory committee members agreed to assume responsibility for the project selection process. Members felt comfortable with this task given their experiences so far, their newly acquired knowledge and the expertise they had developed. Like the advisory committee experience, the selection process was also a learning exercise for most of the members. They relied on the community co-ordinator for assistance and sought advice from community entities in other cities. Community leaders from the City of Ottawa provided the advisory committee with a detailed description of the process used in their community to call for, evaluate and select projects.

Once the advisory committee had integrated Ottawa's advice and working tools into their planning strategy, and had assured themselves that the application package respected the SCPI criteria and guidelines provided by local HRDC staff, requests for proposals were advertised in the community. The RFPs appeared in local newspapers and the community coordinator also sent applications to a number of potential applicants in both communities. The applications encouraged agencies to submit joint funding proposals. Unfortunately, the lack of time and opportunity for agency staff to come together to consider this aspect led to the submission of 11 individual proposals. The community co-ordinator made an initial screening of the proposals, which were distributed to committee members to grade them individually. They then meet in a plenary session to finalize the selection.

Gaps and priorities

As noted, the advisory committee and the greater community relied on the advice of the consultants to help identify the gaps and determine the priorities for the cities of Charlottetown and Summerside. The advisory committee embraced the following priorities:

1. Emergency facilities for male and female homeless and at-risk youth in Charlottetown
2. A facility to house homeless and at-risk young offenders in Summerside
3. A facility to house homeless and at-risk Aboriginal women in Charlottetown
4. An emergency/transitional facility for homeless and at-risk single-parent families in both communities
5. Emergency shelter facilities for homeless men in the cities of Charlottetown and Summerside

6. A transitional facility for male and female homeless and at-risk youth in Charlottetown
7. A transitional facility for adult offenders on probation or parole
8. A transitional facility for persons with disabilities who are transferring from supervised care to independent living arrangements

Implementation to date

- Prince Edward Island was allocated \$50,000 for community planning and \$933,000 for the three years under SCPI, \$266,000 under the UAS, and \$432,000 for youth homelessness. The city of Summerside has made no direct financial contributions to the homelessness initiative to date. The provincial government is considering contributing RRAP funds for renovations to SCPI-funded shelters, but that decision had not yet been made at the time of this report. It has not made any other new financial commitments related to the NHI. This is in part due to a difference in perspective about homelessness in the province. Provincial representatives have expressed disappointment that they were not consulted adequately by the federal government prior to the implementation of the NHI. Their position is that there is not a serious homelessness problem in the province, and that they have already dealt with the issue by funding shelters and addictions services. In their view, the main problem is not homelessness but a lack of affordable housing.

At the time of the case study, five projects had been approved:

Projects Approved to Date
Bedford MacDonald Trust Inc. To purchase a building that will provide emergency bed space to homeless men and women adults (up to 18 beds)
Harvest House Ministries Inc. 1) To purchase a building in Charlottetown where seven beds will be available to homeless female youth and adults (the agency is also counting on the financial assistance of CMHC to renovate the building and their own fund-raising efforts) 2) To purchase a building in Summerside to set up an eight-bed shelter for homeless youth and adult men, some discharged from addictions services and from correctional institutions
Native Council of PEI To purchase a building to set up an eight-bed emergency homeless shelter for Aboriginal women, with or without children
Prince County Family Services, Home Centre Project To purchase a building to set up an emergency and transitional shelter with six beds for young single mothers and their children (Note: the project was subsequently withdrawn)

Three of the agencies have secured their facilities — Bedford McDonald Trust, the Native Council shelter for Aboriginal women and the Harvest House shelter for homeless women. Prior to purchasing the buildings, each of the agencies hired architectural engineers to inspect the

buildings in order to assure their viability. The building inspections were completed during the months of March and April of 2002, prior to final acquisition of the properties.

At the time of the case study, CMHC and provincial officials were in the process of negotiating the distribution of RAPP funds for the SCPI-funded shelters. The managers of the shelters are awaiting the results of the discussions to find out what monies will be available to assist with the expansion and renovation of their facilities. Plans for the other two projects were still pending. The Prince County Family Services' Home Centre Project was awaiting a further assessment by the agency's Board of Directors before going forward with the project (the project has since been withdrawn). The Harvest House Ministries' plan to purchase a facility to provide emergency shelter for men was revised and Harvest House staff is in the process of submitting a bid to purchase a building on another site in the city of Summerside (since this study was conducted, Harvest House has purchased a building and is now in the process of making the necessary renovations).

If the two projects in question do not go forward as expected, there are plans to go ahead with another RFP process in order to consider new projects for the funds that would remain uncommitted.

Key observations

One of the hallmarks of the federal government's homelessness initiative is its flexibility to adapt to circumstances in individual communities. The community case studies highlight this aspect of the Initiative because participating communities all have unique ways of addressing homelessness according to their circumstances and preferred approaches, and all have different ways of adapting the NHI to their particular needs.

In Charlottetown and Summerside, researchers developing the case studies reported the following key observations about the way this community is responding to the federal homelessness initiative to date:

- As a result of the community planning process, respondents, including the consulting group, were surprised to discover just how serious the issue of homelessness was in PEI; this has strengthened their resolve to deal with it.
- Interviewees were asked to comment on both the community planning and selection processes. Overall, participants were satisfied with both. People were pleased with the information collected and shared by the consultants. They were impressed with the level of interest demonstrated by the community about the issue, especially during the community forum held in Charlottetown, which a record number of people attended despite a heavy snowstorm. Attendance at the Summerside meeting was not as impressive, but a number of citizens showed an interest in the issue. Since the completion of the community forums, there is a general sense that the greater community is much better educated about homelessness than it was prior to the Initiative.

- The planning committee expressed concern about HRDC's decision to retain the responsibility of administering the Urban Aboriginal Strategy funds and the youth homelessness funds rather than delegating them to the advisory committee. Members would have preferred the opportunity to control all of the funds, as the larger amount would have provided them with more flexibility and allowed them to consider funding strategies different from those they eventually adopted.
- Interviewees were pleased with the communication strategy used by HRDC and the community co-ordinator during the planning process. Community leaders praised HRDC's efforts at sharing information and offering advice. Those sentiments were extended to the community co-ordinator who — in an effort to deliver consistent and relevant information about the initiative to the community and the media — was elected as the advisory committee's sole spokesperson.
- When asked about the future of the advisory committee, all the interviewees were unclear about whether it will play a role in the coming years. In fact, no one was aware of the community entity's commitment to hold two community report card meetings — one probably in the fall and the other later in the spring of 2003. Some are concerned about the future of the Initiative if federal authorities choose not to support it into the future. This is due in part to the limited provincial government support for the Initiative to date.

Prior to the inception of NHI, all of the agencies attempting to address homelessness were functioning in isolation. Since the NHI, there is a much stronger willingness among agencies to work together than there was before. The community plan brought the players together to discuss the homelessness problem, and as a result they know each other better and can rely on each other more for help with their homeless clients.

- The community demonstrated commitment to the priorities identified in the community plan by awarding regular SCPI dollars to the Native Council of PEI to assist with the development of an Aboriginal women's shelter in Charlottetown, over and above available UAS funds that were dedicated to Aboriginal homelessness.
- Local HRDC staff is presently holding talks with agencies in Charlottetown and Summerside to consider the awarding of SCPI Youth homelessness funds for projects related to youth homelessness in both communities.
- Sustainability remains a major issue for most if not all the projects. Some agencies may be able to rely on fund-raising to pursue their activities, and others may be able to use part of their facilities to raise some assets. Harvest House may be able to rent some of their rooms for profit and/or collect the rental portion of their clients' social assistance cheques to pay for their accommodations. Despite these possibilities, respondents were unanimous in saying that funding beyond 2003 is unsure.

Lessons learned

Researchers for this case study took note of the following lesson that service providers and community planners said they have learned from their experience in coming together and working as a community to address an issue such as homelessness, and in responding to a federal initiative of this type:

- Interviewees commented that the project selection process was successful because it was a real community-based, inclusive process. Conflict of interest rules were respected. Members were able to make well-informed decisions about the projects, as applicants were provided with a chance to respond to queries made by the selection committee. Members were very well supported by the community co-ordinator during the process. And, despite some frustrations and disagreements experienced during the final phase of project selection, members were grateful for the plenary sessions, as they helped the members to solidify their final choices.
- All the volunteer members reaffirmed the wisdom of their decision to appoint a remunerated community co-ordinator. As volunteers, members were much too busy to assume many of the responsibilities associated with the community planning process. They saw it as very important for the progress of the Initiative to be able to rely on the community co-ordinator for these tasks.

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