

## **Community Case Study**

### **Halifax, Nova Scotia**

#### **1. Introduction**

This case study of Halifax 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 the 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 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 own 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 Halifax'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 Halifax, considerable community-based activity was being undertaken in specific areas such as youth services and non-profit housing before the NHI was introduced. There are shelter services within the Halifax area through agencies such as Adsum house, Metro Turning Point, Bryony House, Salvation Army, YMCA and the Micmac Friendship Centre. The shelters offer beds for the night to women and children, young and older males, and Aboriginal people. Transition/support housing is available through agencies such as Phoenix House, Exodus House, St. Leonard's House, Salvation Army and Al-Care Place. A variety of services are provided for the clients of the shelters and transition/support housing such as advocacy, addictions, counseling, employment and upgrading.

Support services available to those in need can be accessed through agencies such as local community health care centers, Hope Cottage, Metro Food Bank Society and various churches. The majority of the agencies are located within close proximity of the downtown core of the city of Halifax and/or Dartmouth.

While numerous services and shelters existed to meet the needs of homeless people, agencies were hampered by insufficient funds.

### Community planning

Considerable community based sector work was done in specific areas such as youth and non-profit housing, before the NHI was introduced. The Homeless Network, a group of service providers, has been meeting every two weeks for the last ten years to discuss the needs of homeless people in the Regional Municipality of Halifax. The Homeless Network is a forum where agencies update each other on the work being done, share information and bring in speakers.

### Involvement by federal, provincial and municipal governments

In the summer of 1999, the deputy ministers of Nova Scotia's departments of Community Services and Housing and Municipal Affairs initiated a roundtable discussion on homelessness. Several groups involved in service delivery and federal representatives from HRDC and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation were invited to participate. The purpose was to develop a better understanding of homeless issues in Halifax and to look at ways of developing strategies to deal with the identified issues. From this meeting, a working group was established, comprising seven people working in the field of homelessness. The working group agreed to:

- hold a one day workshop with a wide range of stakeholders to identify priorities and establish a governance body;
- organize a series of focus groups involving homeless people;
- conduct a review of research and policy literature.

Besides this roundtable initiative, the provincial government in Nova Scotia has contributed through on going per diem funding of shelters and other health and social services. The provincial government and HRDC also have a long history of working together in the labour market and employment fields. The Halifax Regional Municipality has contributed through the provision of public properties at less than market value for community-based initiatives, grants for the purchase of land and construction or renovations, some tax exemptions to reduce operating costs for non-profit community services, and professional assistance to community groups in areas such as land use, permit applications and building codes.

### **3. How Halifax Has Responded to the NHI**

#### Initial work

The NHI was announced in late 1999, which coincided with the one-day meeting planned by the working group for February 2000. Forty agencies and individuals working in homelessness related areas were invited to the meeting. The meeting was open to all interested parties and people were encouraged to bring others they knew with an interest in participating. The approximately 50 attendees were asked to identify strengths and weaknesses in the continuum of services available for homeless people, as a first step in developing a community plan to address homelessness. Participants heard presentations from the perspective of homeless people. As well, HRDC staff gave an overview of the NHI, including the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) and the youth homelessness component. A committee was nominated by participants to form a steering committee to work with all orders of government on homelessness. While there was some overlap with the working group noted above, a number of new members were added to broaden the perspective.

Halifax was among the very earliest communities to respond to the announcement of the NHI. One result of this was that there remained many details to work out in Ottawa with regard to the formal administration of the NHI funds and the terms and conditions for the funds. Local HRDC staff working on the NHI spent considerable time attending meetings and one-on-one clarification sessions about the information needed to fill out project proposals. As a result of being well positioned, Halifax was on several occasions able to send community representatives to Ottawa to participate in discussions and working groups during the development of the NHI guidelines.

### Community planning process

Through on-going community consultation and the help of an outside consultant, the steering committee determined the composition, mission statement and terms of reference for Community Action on Homelessness – the umbrella organization to carry out the action plan. Currently, there are 255 individuals and organizations on the mailing list. While some communities identified the municipal government or a non-governmental agency to act as an “entity” for administering the SCPI funds, circumstances in Halifax led, as it did in other communities, to HRDC developing the shared model, in which the Steering Committee would allocate SCPI funds, and HRDC would administer the resulting project contribution agreements.

The Community Action on Homelessness gives the community an institutional framework for ongoing, formalized efforts to deal with homelessness. The steering committee members have agreed to be on the committee until March 2003 and there is continuing discussion about what needs to be in place for the steering committee to continue the work after this date.

Concern about the potential of government representatives to influence steering committee decisions resulted in a decision that government representatives attend the steering committee meetings as resource people only and do not have a vote. Steering committee members developed conflict of interest guidelines so that when potential funding was being discussed for particular sectors, steering committee members who had an interest in that sector would leave the room, and this would be recorded in the minutes.

Monthly meetings of the steering committee generally last half a day. It was felt that since most meetings are held during working hours and all but homeless people receive a salary, they should receive an honorarium from SCPI funds of \$50.00 for a half-day meeting, \$100.00 for a full day and \$20.00 for sub-committee work. (There will not be a claw-back from Social Services because honorariums are not considered as income.)

Working groups were originally established to support the steering committee’s work and various sub committees continue with this function, including Youth, Women with Children, Funding, Multiple Needs and Sub-standard Housing.

There are also sub-committees on Communications, Communications Advisory Group, September Workshop, Community Plan Evaluation, Research Round Table Organizing, Increased Linkages, Community Support, Advisory Group and Research Group. Sub committees members are volunteers with some experience in a particular area who are invited to join by the steering committee. Sub-committee meeting minutes are incorporated into the steering committee minutes and made available to everyone, but sub-committee meetings are not open.

The steering committee facilitated the development of the Community Action Plan using focus groups discussions with homeless people, an agency information form and on-going discussions with the various working groups. The Community Action Plan on Homelessness was approved with the following directions:

- Begin work on immediate action priorities but communicate effectively with all stakeholders and be open and transparent in all activities and decision-making.
- Develop a clear statement of the mission, goals and objectives as a basis for ongoing evaluation and accountability.
- Take immediate steps to acquire resources to hire a full-time coordinator.
- Identify priorities and prepare for upcoming decisions by government on allocation of new resources to address immediate housing needs and program development opportunities.
- Consider the establishment of working groups or sub-committees on particular issues such as youth homelessness, multi-needs groups and women and children.
- Develop a communication strategy to influence public awareness and choices on homelessness issues and make government more aware of the nature and extent of the problem in Nova Scotia.

To support the work of the steering committee, a coordinator was hired in June 2000. Originally, this position was funded through local HRDC employment programs, and it is now funded through SCPI, as is a communications officer hired in July 2001. Both positions are administered through the North End Community Health Centre.

When the dedicated homelessness funding for the Aboriginal community became available under the NHI, Aboriginal groups met informally to decide how the money would best be used, and originally decided that it would be divided among three groups representing different elements of the community. In subsequent discussions with the mainstream Steering Committee, it was decided that the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre would receive funding through the main SCPI fund because it was based in downtown Halifax and provided core shelter services. The UAS funding was thus available to the other two groups, one of which has received project funding. The other group had withdrawn its project proposal and had not resubmitted it at the time of this report. The Aboriginal groups chose not to sit on the Steering Committee.

Youth Homelessness funding was available in addition to the SCPI funding as well, and this money was administered by HRDC, primarily because initially the funding was only available through existing HRDC youth programs, and had to meet the conditions of those programs, which were different than SCPI and related to employment training and preparation, or youth employment on community projects. This has since changed, so that youth homelessness projects can be funded using SCPI terms and conditions, which are broader. HRDC youth officers work closely with the Steering Committee and the

HRDC homelessness facilitator to ensure that youth homelessness funding is in keeping with community priorities. There are youth-focused agencies on the Steering Committee.

### Gaps and priorities

The five priorities identified in the community plan are:

- Homelessness issues affecting women and children
- Homelessness issues affecting youth
- Homelessness issues affecting people with multiple needs
- Development of housing stock and physical facilities
- Policy and planning priorities

### Implementation to date

For the first round of project proposal submissions (November-December 2000), the community was asked for expressions of interest and 32 letters were received. HRDC staff and the coordinator contacted the 32 agencies and requested clarification from them. Following review by the steering committee, 16 agencies received SCPI funding. For the second round, 19 agencies submitted proposals.

If a proposal or an expression of interest is submitted to the steering committee and the agency does not receive funding, the agency is given the opportunity to meet with the community coordinator. Some agencies have done this. At the time of the case study, the following projects were underway with funding from the first round:

<b>Projects that Received Funding</b>	
1.	Adsum House; residential facility for women and their children, including meals and counselling
2.	Alice Housing; transitional housing for women
3.	Association for Persons in Recovery from Addictions and Abuse, support services to organizations working with women in recovery from addictions
4.	Community Care Network Society; Parker Street Food and Furniture Bank
5.	Centre for Diverse Cultures, encourages the well being of immigrants and refugees
6.	Freedom Foundation of Nova Scotia; transitional housing and support to men recovering from addictions
7.	Mainline Needle Exchange; methadone program to reduce the spread of blood-borne diseases among populations engaging in high-risk activity
8.	Marguerite Centre; supportive residential housing for women suffering addictions or abuse

9. Metro Non-Profit Housing Association; supportive housing for single low-income individuals
10. Metro Non-Profit Housing Association; Shining Lights Choir and support centre, the choir is managed by its members and the support centre helps individuals move forward to stable and integrated living
11. Metro Turning Point; provides shelter and some services to homeless men
12. Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre; Kina'matino'kuom Shelter; provides emergency shelter services to Aboriginal people experiencing crisis situations
13. North End Community Health Centre, promotes healthy living by providing primary health care services, education and advocacy
14. Saint Leonard's Society Nova Scotia; Berry House, supports women who are homeless and in crisis
15. Salvation Army Halifax; Booth Centre, provides shelter for men 19 years and older
16. <i>Street Feat</i> , newspaper dedicated to poverty and homelessness issues
17. Tawaak Housing Association; Housing Solutions for Aboriginal Peoples*
18. Youth-Homeless Project; Brunswick Street United Church will re-open Camp Brunswick for single parents and disadvantaged children**
19. Homeless Youth Project-Phoenix Youth Programs, offers supportive accommodation**
20. Youth-Homeless Project; Regional Independent Student Association, addresses the needs of students at increased risk of not completing high school**

\* UAS funded, \*\* Youth Initiative funded

### 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 Halifax, researchers developing the case studies reported the following key observation(s) about the way this community is responding to the federal homelessness initiative to date:

- As in most communities, there is little hard data available on the nature and extent of homelessness in Halifax, and in Halifax there is some disagreement on the need for such information, and on whether to allocate resources to it. Some steering committee members feel that those who work with the homeless community know what is going on and there is no need to use valuable resources collecting statistics. People who support the need for data feel there is a growing interest

among other community members in gathering quantitative data, and in planning on the basis of research-based information.

- Service providers indicate that the type of people who are homeless is changing. Years ago, the majority were elderly men, but now people between the ages of 16 and 35 form the highest percentage of their clientele. There is also an increase in the number of families accessing the supports and utilizing the shelters.
- Halifax's social services are clustered in the downtown harbour area and the suburbs are widely dispersed with inadequate public transportation, although that is where the majority of affordable housing is located. It is very difficult to find affordable housing in Halifax and everyone spoken with mentioned the need for more affordable, safe housing.
- All community members spoken with referred to HRDC working in collaboration with the community. They said that HRDC staff helped the group stay focused and gave a lot of needed encouragement during the difficult period of developing the community plan. Three steering committee members said that HRDC staff are learning a lot about being involved with non-government organizations in the community, and HRDC staff agree that this is the case.
- The composition of the steering committee is a concern voiced by a majority of the people spoken with. Some communities are not currently represented, such as black Nova Scotians, immigrants, gays and lesbians, and Aboriginal peoples. It has been suggested that more youth and homeless people be on the committee, which has been struggling with the dilemma of how to be inclusive yet keep the steering committee size to a working group of 15–18 people.
- Everyone spoken with who had used the proposal-writing information package found it very useful. People remarked on using a lot of agency staff time to complete the required amount of HRDC paperwork. It was also mentioned that the approval process for the second round was much slower than for the first round.
- Several people mentioned that SCPI helped to create a place for all levels of government to work together within the community and discuss homeless issues. Community members frequently mentioned that the three levels of government came to the table with an open mind and a willingness to look within guidelines to see where governments could be flexible to work with the community. This was one of the key reasons given for the success of the NHI.
- Through the steering committee, the community has learned how to communicate with government and “get through the red tape.” For example,



community groups learned how to approach City Council and the local newspaper, speaking with a united voice.

- The majority of people spoken with feel that the networking capacity of the community has been developed. Halifax is a small city where everyone knows each other and there was, and continues to be, a small amount of programming money available. In the past, partnerships among agencies were not equal, partially due to the fact some agencies had access to money and others did not. The NHI helped to bring agencies together and create opportunities to better understand the role each agency plays in the continuum of service. Working together for a common cause has helped to equalize relationships.
- Sustainability was raised in Halifax as the most challenging issue facing the steering committee. Even though SCPI has a three-year time, as one person expressed it, “financially SCPI is the only game in town and it was the stimulus that helped everyone to come together.” After March 2003, however, federal funding under the NHI ends, and other sources of funding are expected to be limited.
- New partnerships have developed, for example Metro Non-Profit, Dalhousie University and the Canadian Mental Health Association (Halifax Branch) are now working together. The street magazine, *Street Feet*, now has a partnership with the Community Action on Homelessness, which has a regular column in the magazine, and the magazine is the official photographer at events.
- The Shining Lights Choir originally had four members, now it has 20 to 25. The choir is composed of homeless people and service providers. The majority of homeless people spoken with wanted to talk about the choir before discussing anything else. There were comments about increasing people’s self-confidence and being on national radio. The choir had performed in Halifax the week of this study and the excitement, pride in and enthusiasm for the choir carried over for several days.

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