

Homelessness Case Study Ottawa, Ontario

1. Introduction

This case study of the city of Ottawa 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 Ottawa'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 serving homeless people and people at risk

2. Homelessness Activities Prior to the Federal Government Initiative

Extent of overall activity, programs, facilities

Many of Ottawa's charitable and non-profit organizations involved with homeless persons have existed since the early 1900s, and some even earlier than that. The Union Mission for Men was founded in 1906. The Shepherds of Good Hope and the Salvation Army Booth Centre have also operated shelters and offered other services to homeless people for many years. Even with financial support from the province and the city, the shelters continue to depend a great deal on the generosity of the community for their existence. For example, approximately 60 percent of the Union Mission's funding comes from the community at large, with a small portion from the United Way. This funding ensures that the men's shelters are able to provide enhanced services

for their clients; for example, clothing, addiction services and spiritual counseling. Most shelter providers also expect their clients to pay a portion of their provincial pension (Ontario Disability Support Program) or their social assistance (Ontario Works) to help pay for their temporary shelter costs.

Community planning

Until the 1980s, there was very little collaboration among homeless shelters and/or service providers in the region. In the early 1990s, as a response to the growing problem of homelessness, the Shelter Advisory Committee, made up of the Union Mission, the Shepherds of Good Hope and the Salvation Army Booth Centre, formed the first coalition to advocate for funding and support from the community for homeless people in the regional municipality of Ottawa-Carleton. In May, 1995, several service providers came together to create the Alliance to End Homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton. The Alliance, which includes the City of Ottawa as a member, continues to collaborate on homelessness issues in the region.

Involvement by federal, provincial and municipal governments

The Region of Ottawa-Carleton's Social Services Department (now the City of Ottawa's Housing Branch) has been providing emergency shelter services to homeless families in the region for 151 years, and funding community agencies to provide these services to homelessness men, women and youth.

In the mid 1990s, the Province of Ontario assigned responsibility for the funding of social services to municipal governments, promoted the amalgamation of cities in the region of Ottawa into one large municipality, and made cuts to social services spending (in 1995). Although Ottawa's economy continued to perform well, homelessness remained a serious problem. In response, in the spring of 1999, the former Region of Ottawa-Carleton's Community Services Committee approved the creation of the Homelessness Initiatives Team, made up of staff from the Social Services, Public Health and Housing departments. This decision was influenced by the Provincial Task Force Report on Homelessness in October 1998, which designated municipalities as the local service managers for homelessness. It was also influenced by *The Golden Report*, released by the Toronto Mayor's Task Force on homelessness in January 1999.

The mandate of Ottawa's Homelessness Initiatives Team was to create partnerships with service providers in the city in order to co-ordinate the delivery of shelter and support services to homeless people in the amalgamated City of Ottawa. One of the team's first actions was to complete an environmental scan in early 1999. Soon after, the team invited the members of the Alliance to End Homelessness, as well as all the agencies and service providers for the homeless, and members of the business community to a planning session. That meeting produced the report entitled, "Creating Community Solutions, An Action Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton," in June 1999.

That report put forward 22 recommendations to deal with homelessness. One of the city's major objectives was to convince its federal and provincial partners and the private sector to focus on strategies to create more affordable housing. The City's view is that lack of affordable housing is the major stumbling block to resolving homelessness. The city also agreed to facilitate the co-ordination and integration of services related to homelessness in Ottawa, and has proposed a number of actions and time frames designed to deal with homelessness on all fronts.

The Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) has maintained funding through six homelessness program streams in the community. MCSS has for years shared the costs of operating emergency shelters with the City of Ottawa on an 80/20 basis, and run its Domiciliary Hostels Program, which funds private boarding homes for those at risk of homelessness. Per diem rates for both types of dwellings were increased in December 2000. MCSS also funds three Homelessness Response programs: the Hostel Redirection Fund (since April, 1999), the Provincial Homelessness Initiatives Program (since November 1998) and the Community Partners Program (since January 2000). Funding is also provided for the Supports for Daily Living program to assist homeless individuals with mental health issues (since January 2000). Finally, the Ministry created the Off the Streets into Shelters Fund (January 2001) to assist agencies that offer services to hard-to-serve homeless people. The City administers most of the funding from these programs.

Beginning in 1999-2000 the Regional Municipality has also committed \$1 million annually in funding for the renovation and/or construction of affordable housing.

3. How Ottawa Has Responded to the Federal Government Initiative

Initial work by HRDC

As in most participating communities across the country, local HRDC staff began to plan the implementation of the Initiative shortly after the announcement of the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) and the NHI as a whole. One of the challenges in implementing the NHI in Ottawa was the fact that HRDC had not been active on homelessness-related issues until then, and had not established working relationships with the city or with groups that were most active in providing services for homeless people in the community. Part of the local HRDC team's early mandate was to begin discussions on the establishment of a "community entity" in Ottawa to manage and coordinate the implementation of the NHI.

In the early part of the Initiative, the local HRDC office invited proposals from individual agencies for some Urgent Needs projects. Seven such projects were approved prior to the community entity agreement with the City of Ottawa in the fall of 2000. This direct funding through HRDC was used until an agreement was in place for the City to be the community entity responsible to administer SCPI funds.

While it was recognized in the community that the funding of urgently needed projects could not wait until the community entity agreement was in place, HRDC's funding of the initial projects raised concerns because it was seen as not in keeping with the community's planned approach to

addressing homelessness. The city's team and the Alliance appealed to HRDC to direct all of its funds to the City of Ottawa as the community entity for SCPI funding in order to co-ordinate the funding of services for the homeless in the region based on gaps and priorities identified in the June 1999 report.

Community planning process

In June 2000, the City and the Alliance held a second community planning session (which was funded by HRDC) and invited HRDC staff to participate. They went to great lengths to invite everyone involved in homelessness, including landlords and other private sector representatives. The resulting updated plan was approved by local politicians and supported by HRDC, and became the basis for the community entity agreement to implement the NHI in Ottawa. The following participants were involved in planning:

Overall Community Planning

- 4 municipal groups
- 2 provincial groups
- 3 federal groups
- 22 community groups

Youth Homelessness steering committee

- 7 community agency representatives
- Municipal representatives
- HRDC-Ottawa representatives

Aboriginal Homelessness steering committee

- 8 Aboriginal community agency representatives

Community Project Selection committee (June 2001)

- 3 municipal representatives
- a delegate from Minister Bradshaw's office
- 1 private sector representative
- community agency representatives
- social housing network representatives
- 2 homeless individuals

Community Planning Project steering committee

- 2 United Way representatives
- 3 community agency representatives
- 6 municipal representatives

The community entity model was adopted as being well suited to the approach being put forward by the City of Ottawa. The city, the Alliance and HRDC have now established a clear and

positive working relationship in which the city takes responsibility for the coordination of community planning and the allocation of SCPI resources, HRDC administers the community entity agreement with the city as well as the funding agreements that were in place prior to the community entity being established. Since the signing of the community entity agreement in the Winter of 2001, local HRDC staff and the city meet on a monthly basis to monitor activities and coordinate efforts.

Independently, and (for purposes of implementing the NHI) under the community entity model, the city's Homelessness Initiatives team facilitates homelessness service delivery, sets priorities and allocates funding from three sources: NHI, provincial and municipal. The team continues to work on developing a shared vision with all its community partners, including Aboriginal groups and agencies serving homeless youth, and continues to work with its partners on a strategy to manage service delivery.

Aboriginal groups and youth services were included in the community planning process from the start (prior to the NHI). In the case of Aboriginal groups, the Executive Director of Kagita Mikam, whose agency was chosen as the funding administrator of new monies for Aboriginal homelessness in Eastern Ontario under the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS), was invited to sit on the city's homelessness projects selection committee.

In the case of youth services, the Ottawa Youth Services Bureau partnered with the City of Ottawa to develop strategies to secure youth homelessness funding in the early stages of the process. In 2000 and 2001, the agency collaborated with various community agencies with an interest in youth homelessness and with the City of Ottawa to develop SCPI funding proposals, which the local HRDC office administers.

At time of writing, the City was in the process of inviting agencies that serve the homeless to submit project proposals for the fall of 2001. The terms required that project applicants ensure that their projects address the gaps and priorities identified in the Community Action Plan.

The next community planning phase will concentrate on "Sector Planning." Member agencies in different sectors of service delivery will be invited to do a needs analysis or service planning to determine the requirements of specific homeless groups. One example is the recent Inner-City Health project to develop a plan to provide comprehensive health services to the homeless. Another example is the establishment of a working group made up of agencies that provide services to individuals with addictions. The working group will develop strategies to deal with homeless persons with addictions. As well, another group will develop a "Harm Reduction curriculum" for use in this community.

The City's other preoccupation will be to develop a research agenda and a system management model for service delivery. The evaluation of agency programs is already ongoing and the Centre for Research on Community Services has been contracted to collect and analyze data from 51 funded projects. Results are shared with agency representatives at quarterly meetings so that the context surrounding the data results can be identified. These discussions are designed to assist agencies with their service planning.

Gaps and priorities

In the City of Ottawa's "Addendum to the Ottawa Community Plan to End and Prevent Homelessness" (Fall 2000), community planners identified 10 prioritized service gaps for the general homeless, Aboriginal homeless and homeless youth populations. These prioritized service gaps have been targeted for funding and/or action by the community and for financial support from the SCPI program.

For the general homeless and at-risk population

1. Coordination of services to all homeless and at risk people including youth and Aboriginals
2. Increased access to social and supportive housing
3. Expansion of supportive services for diverse needs, including mental illness
4. Coordination of health care for homeless and at-risk people
5. Availability of information and assistance to at-risk people on financial and support services for preventing homelessness
6. Development of a full-range of addiction services

For the Aboriginal homeless and at-risk population

7. Supportive services including demonstration projects to test methods for providing support services

For homeless and at-risk youth

8. Supportive services including demonstration projects to test methods for providing support services
9. Expansion of social and supportive housing
10. Improved access to health care for homeless and at-risk youth

Implementation to date

The Ottawa community plan's gaps and priorities, and the funding available from all sources and the terms under which they can be spent, determine decisions about the projects to be funded. As of the fall of 2001, a total of 41 homelessness projects have been approved for SCPI funding in the City of Ottawa.

Projects Approved in fall 2001
1 project to fund the City's Community Action Planning strategy
1 project to provide support services to homeless immigrants
1 project to provide support services to homeless persons with addictions
2 projects to provide integrated health care services to homeless persons

3 projects to provide support services to homeless persons with mental health issues
3 projects to increase public awareness of homelessness in the community
6 projects to provide shelter and support to Aboriginal men, women and families
11 projects to provide a diversity of support services to homeless persons
13 projects to provide shelter and support services to homeless persons

Having Aboriginal representation in the project selection process has facilitated the co-ordination of funding for Aboriginal homeless projects in Ottawa. For example, Pinganodin Lodge (a shelter for Aboriginal men with addictions) and the Aboriginal Women's Support Centre were recipients of SCPI monies from the city of Ottawa and funding from the Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle (financial resources administered by the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreements).

Preliminary 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 Ottawa, researchers developing the case studies reported the following key observations about the way this community is responding to the federal homelessness initiative to date:

- Prior to federal government involvement in homelessness, the City of Ottawa already had in place a process of bringing together community partners on homelessness to initiate a community planning process, develop partnerships with agencies, shelter providers and the Alliance to End Homelessness, and had established a process to evaluate services to homeless people.
- The City and its community partners have instituted annual strategies to review and revise the community action plan on homelessness. The city has engaged partners at the University of Ottawa to conduct a two-year evaluation of services funded through the city for homeless people.
- Local HRDC staff has worked hard to establish a working relationship with the City of Ottawa that satisfies NHI criteria and respects the city's established role of managing the response to homelessness. There continue to be concerns in some areas of administration and accountability, due to what community members see as overly burdensome and unnecessarily detailed federal demands for information, but these do not appear to be affecting the implementation of the NHI and federal requirements are being met.

- The community had strong concerns about the Urgent Needs funding. The City of Ottawa and its partner, the Alliance to End and Prevent Homelessness, met with the HRDC team to share the concern that, in their opinion, some funded projects did little to alleviate homelessness, and that HRDC's strategy seemed counterproductive to the plans of the Homelessness Initiative team and the Alliance committee to deliver a coordinated model of services to Ottawa's homeless population. HRDC's strategy was seen as unwittingly encouraging a spirit of competition among shelter providers rather than one of cooperation. Indeed, some shelter providers had sought the support of their federal Members of Parliament for their particular projects. The local HRDC office recognized the problem, and worked with the city to put in place an entity agreement that would enable the city to manage SCPI funding allocations.
- When asked to assess the impact of the federal NHI to date, community planners were consistent in stating that SCPI funding had a remarkable impact in specific areas: housing placements, the prevention of evictions, (e.g., Salvation Army rent bank program) and transitional housing. There are also examples of linkages between different service providers in the city, that have arisen as a result of projects funded through the federal Initiative that reportedly would not have happened without the federal funding, such as:
 - Wabano Health Centre shares a nurse practitioner with other Aboriginal centers;
 - Aboriginal outreach workers have created a coalition designed to co-ordinate service delivery to homeless Aboriginals;
 - Addictions agencies have formed a work group to look at the improvement of their services to homeless persons with addictions;
 - The Ottawa Inner City Health project provides health care services to several shelters in Ottawa;
 - The Youth Services Bureau is working closely with Housing Help/Action Logement to assist homeless and at-risk bi-sexual, gay and lesbian youth.
- The majority of people consulted in the development of this case study identified the lack of permanent affordable housing as the leading cause of the homelessness problem in Ottawa. The widely held belief is that the homelessness problem will persist and even worsen if more affordable housing is not made available in the Ottawa area, despite the positive efforts made with the assistance of the NHI.

Lessons learned

Researchers for this case study took note of the following lessons 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:

- Service providers need more time and resources to respond to requests for proposals. The timing of the NHI as a three-year funding Initiative has skewed planning efforts

somewhat by imposing what are sometimes seen as impractical deadlines on resource allocation decisions.

- Planners at the City and community agencies have recognized the importance of informing the community at large of their successes at alleviating homelessness in order to sustain funding. (Planners note, however, that they have had very little success so far in finding sustainable funding, despite their efforts to inform the community of their successes.)
- The City has worked hard to ensure the transfer of skills to service providers, support organizational development within community organizations, encourage growth and assist with on-going planning, monitoring and evaluation of service provision, in order to build a sustainable and well planned approach to address homelessness.
- The community in Ottawa needs specific funding for increasing the availability of local expertise and projects that are on the leading edge of innovative service. Under the NHI, funding of projects is dependent on demonstrable sustainability over time. There is also a need for funding for demonstration projects that will seek to foster the development of new and innovative approaches and new kinds of expertise.
- Governments need to support community planning and systems management for the long-term, as this kind of capacity-building is essential to sustain action to address homelessness.

Fall 2001