

Evaluation - National Homelessness Initiative Fall 2001

Homelessness Project Case Study Pinganodin Lodge Ottawa, Ontario

1. Introduction

This is one of a series of case studies of homelessness projects funded, at least in part, through the federal government's National Homelessness Initiative (NHI). Human Resources Development Canada is producing the case studies in order to contribute to the government's understanding of how the NHI is working at the community level, the extent to which the Initiative's objectives are being achieved, and what can be learned from the experiences in individual communities that may be applicable in other communities. "Community case studies" look at what the community as a whole is doing to address homelessness. "Project case studies" focus on one particular project funded at least in part through the NHI. This is a project case study of the Pinganodin Lodge in Ottawa.

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 a series of interviews with people representing the following groups:

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

2. Description of the Project

Pinganodin Lodge is a shelter for Aboriginal men wishing to recover from a dependence on alcohol and/or drugs. The shelter offers services solely to men, who are aged 16 years and older and have expressed a desire to overcome their addictions. The program is inclusive. Services are available to all men who meet the agency's admission criteria. The agency also provides outreach services to Aboriginal men, women and youth in the Ottawa community.

Conditions Prior to Project Implementation

Pinganodin Lodge was established in the mid 1990's. It was created to respond to the needs of Aboriginal men with addiction problems. Prior to its existence, the target group was forced to seek such services from mainstream agencies in the region. With the Lodge established, these individuals can now access services that are responsive to their physical, spiritual and cultural needs.

Prior to NHI, this agency depended on funding from a variety of sources to administer its programs. HRDC, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Aboriginal Health & Wellness, Kagita Mikam (HRDC Aboriginal Employment funding) and fund raising activities contributed to the agency's budget. The monies from these funding sources were directed to the costs of sheltering and dispensing addictions services to clients.

Soon after Pinganodin Lodge was established, staff recognized the need for outreach services to Aboriginals. A limited amount of funding from Kagita Mikam paid the salary of a part-time outreach worker. As knowledge of the Lodge grew in the community, more and more agencies referred their Aboriginal clients to the Lodge. This brought about the need for more outreach services, and a proposal was submitted to the City of Ottawa for SCPI funding to assist in the expansion of the outreach team.

Pinganodin Lodge is housed in Bronson Centre in Ottawa. It has the capacity to serve a maximum of nine men. The program is open to any male with addictions, but it is designed in particular so that Aboriginal men can receive culturally appropriate services. So far, the agency has provided assistance to Aboriginals exclusively.

The agency's clients live at the Lodge, each with their own private rooms. They have access to all the shelter's facilities, including meals. The lodge provides a 5-month addictions program which includes the following activities: individual and group counselling, Healing circles with Aboriginal Elders, arts & crafts activities, lifeskills training and a community kitchen. Individuals are expected to participate actively in program activities. Once they have terminated the program, clients are encouraged to integrate the broader community. At that time they are referred to other agencies that can help them with job search, income security programs, housing, and other needs.

What the Project Involves

Outreach services for Aboriginals in the Ottawa region had been identified as an urgent need early in the process of setting up Pinganodin Lodge. Prior to the NHI, one part-time outreach worker devoted part of his time to outreach for Aboriginal men. The NHI funding covered the cost of the salary of one full-time outreach worker for the next three years. Another full-time position is funded by the Aboriginal Healing & Wellness program. Four auxiliary outreach positions are paid for by Kagita Mikam with Aboriginal Employment program funds.

The outreach program is a key element to the Lodge's strategy of identifying and integrating homeless Aboriginal men with addictions issues into their program. The agency's six outreach workers have been trained to seek out and assist homeless Aboriginal men in need of support for their addictions. The men they encounter are either invited to participate in the agency's activities, if appropriate, or referred to other Aboriginal or mainstream agencies for assistance. All of the Aboriginal women and youth encountered by the outreach team, are referred to other service providers for assistance.

3. Implementation to Date

The Outreach Program is in place and has been fully operational since the Spring of 2001. Currently, nine Aboriginal men with addictions are residing at the Lodge, and outreach workers have recruited new residents that were previously unknown to the Lodge. In addition, the manager of the agency's outreach team has participated in the creation of a coalition of outreach workers from other agencies that serve Aboriginal individuals in the area. The coalition, made up of the ODAWA Native Friendship Centre, the Aboriginal Women's Support Centre, the Wabano Aboriginal Health Centre and a local Inuit organisation, was recently formed.

At the present time, outreach workers refer appropriate clients to each other. They also share information about available resources and services in the community. They also work together to ensure that clients who choose to live on the streets all year long and those who participate in their programs are getting the health and support services they need to live as adequately as possible. They do this by working closely with staff from the Wabano Aboriginal Health Centre, the Wabano Youth Cyber Café, Centre 504 and the Somerset West Community Health Centre. They also help temporary inmates of Ottawa's local Correctional Centre and the Rideau Correctional Centre in Burritt's Rapids to prepare their integration into the community, by informing them about their services and other services available in the Ottawa region.

What Remains to be Implemented

The contribution from the NHI for outreach services has been fully implemented. Currently, the Lodge's Executive Director and his Board are preparing for the approval of a SCPI proposal to expand the shelter program's services from a capacity of 9 to 24 beds. The outreach team's activities have increased awareness in the community about the need for more addictions services for Aboriginals (especially men) in the region.

4. Outcomes to Date

While it is too early to assess the outcomes of the Outreach Program for individual clients, we can make the following preliminary observations:

- Where previously the Lodge had one part-time outreach worker capable of providing culturally responsive services, SCPI funding allowed the agency to increase significantly the level of outreach services in the community for Aboriginal peoples. Six staff now offer outreach services, and in addition participate in the co-ordination of the delivery of services with outreach workers employed by other Aboriginal agencies in the city.
- Since the establishment of Pinganodin Lodge's outreach team, members of the Ottawa Police force, the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Centretown Community Health Centre, the Causeway Centre and Centre 507 work in collaboration with this agency to make sure that Aboriginals are getting the services they need in this community. For example, the police work with the outreach team to identify Aboriginal men with addictions that could take advantage of the Lodge's services. Other agencies consult with the outreach team to guarantee that Aboriginals and their families are supported while they integrate into the Ottawa community.
- When asked about the Lodge's ability to meet service demands, the Outreach manager was satisfied that the needs of their clients were being met at this time. He could not predict the future demand on services if, as expected, Aboriginal families in need of support continue to choose Ottawa as a potential city to establish themselves in.

Client Comments

The research to develop this case study included interviews with seven clients of Pinganodin Lodge. Their comments included:

- "I've had different problems during my life. I panhandle on the streets so I can buy some food. I can come here (Pinganodin Lodge) if I need something."

37-year-old male Aboriginal

- “I did work for awhile. I find it difficult to find a place to live (here in Ottawa). I believe that I am a victim of prejudice. If I need anything, the people here (Pinganodin Lodge) try to get it for me.”

31-year-old male Metis

5. Lessons Learned related to NHI

We can make the following observations within the context of the NHI evaluation:

- The Outreach Program expansion was reported to have been greatly assisted by the collaborative approach with other groups in the community, both in planning and in the implementation of the project. The City of Ottawa, local police, community health centres and other Aboriginal groups in the community supported the project.
- The Board and staff of Pinganodin Lodge expressed concerns about the delays in obtaining SCPI funding in order to hire the staff to set up outreach services in the community.