

## **Evaluation - National Homelessness Initiative Fall 2001**

### **Homelessness Project Case Study Shepherds of Good Hope, Harm Reduction Program 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 Shepherds of Good Hope Harm Reduction Program 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**

The Shepherds of Good Hope is an agency that maintains a variety of housing options for homeless individuals, including a temporary shelter, transitional housing, and low-rental housing. This agency also provides meals on a daily basis to homeless singles and families, and

dispenses food and clothing to its clients on a regular basis.

### Conditions Prior to Project Implementation

Prior to the NHI, the staff of the Shepherds of Good Hope were providing some limited assistance to men and women with a chronic addiction to alcohol. The agency offered a “Hope Recovery” program situated in separate quarters in its main shelter in downtown Ottawa, where inebriated individuals could find temporary (usually over-night) shelter, day or night. Help to clients was limited to the provision of a bed, and referral for those who expressed a desire to deal with their alcohol addictions.

The agency depended on funding from two sources to administer the “Hope Recovery” program. Most of the funding was provided by the region’s Social Services Department through per diems for shelter residents, with the balance coming from fund-raising activities.

### What the Project Involves

In the late 1990’s the Shepherds of Good Hope staff wanted to respond to the concerns expressed by local police, health providers and the broader community about intoxicated individuals on the streets. Prior to the Harm Reduction program, “hard-core alcoholics” were usually picked up by police and incarcerated in the local Detox Centre, a jail cell at Ottawa Police headquarters. The following day, once they had sobered up, they were either released back into the community, held for court appearances because of charges (e.g. drunk & disorderly) or referred to hospitals (if they needed hospital care) or other community agencies for assistance.

Shepherds of Good Hope staff worked with community partners such as the local police, hospitals, and social service providers to create a better strategy to assist this population. Together, they set up a Harm Reduction (Alcohol Management) program. The program was conceived and designed, and ready to implement in March, 1999, but at that time the agency did not have the financial resources to implement it.

Once the federal government made monies available through SCPI, the agency submitted a proposal for funding to the City of Ottawa, which by then was administering the SCPI funding. Monies were granted to pay the salaries of two staff for the Harm Reduction (Alcohol Management) program. The program has the capacity to serve a maximum of 10 men and/or women wishing to control their dependence to alcohol. All the current clients except one live full-time at the shelter. Staff support is available 24 hours a day. During the day, “chronic alcoholic” clients are served a limited amount of home-made wine. The wine is increasingly diluted, so that the amounts of alcohol served are reduced gradually over the long-term with the intention of improving their overall health and limiting their dependence on alcohol. During their stay in the program, clients are encouraged to change their lifestyles. Agency staff

and health care workers from the Ottawa Inner City Health project provide them with medication as needed, and encourage them to keep their medical appointments. The agency also offers counselling and encourages clients to get involved in community activities. Those activities often involve renewing family ties, participating in day programs maintained by agencies such as Centre 454 or Centre 507, and creating new relationships in the community in order to sustain the changes in their lives.

### Objectives of the Project

The agency's main goal is to provide long-term support in the form of alcohol management and health care to clients with chronic alcohol problems. Where previously Shepherds of Good Hope did not have qualified staff to provide these professional services, funding through the NHI is intended to pay the costs of two dedicated and qualified staff persons to operate the Harm Reduction program until 2003, after which staff will need to find new sources of funding. The costs of housing the clients is covered through the operating costs of the shelter as a whole, and through the continued payment of per diems by the Region's Social Services Department.

### **3. Implementation to Date**

The Shepherds of Good Hope agency is now able to provide a secure and stable alcohol management program to men and women with chronic addictions to alcohol. The agency also maintains partnerships with the Ottawa Inner City Health project, the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre, the Victorian Order of Nurses and the Oasis program for clients with HIV/AIDS, to help manage the overall health requirements of its Harm Reduction clients.

There was strong support from the community to set up the project. For example, local police forces were grateful at the prospect of directing intoxicated individuals to the Shepherds of Good Hope rather than their Detox Centre. Social workers in local hospitals can now refer their homeless and alcoholic patients to this agency for support.

The Harm Reduction program has been in place since it received SCPI funding in the Spring of 2001, and has been functioning at full capacity since its inception. There is a continuous waiting list for its services (as many as 25 to 30 clients at any given time), and program staff are already seeking additional funding that would enable them to expand the program and reduce the waiting list.

Project sustainability remains a factor in the program's long term planning. Monies have been committed until the Spring of 2003. The agency has already made efforts to seek other sources of funds in order to maintain the program once the SCPI funds are no longer available.

#### 4. Outcomes to Date

It is premature to comment on any potential long-term benefits for the clients of the Harm Reduction program, but it is possible to make the following preliminary observations:

- Since the spring of 2001, the program has served its capacity of 10 clients, as well as another individual who resides in the community but participates in addictions treatment at the Program. The police and other service providers in the community (hospitals, Centre 454, Centre 507) continue to refer individuals to the program.
- Those 10 individuals residing at the Shepherds of Good Hope now have a stable residence where before they lived primarily on the street or in day shelters. As well, they are participating in an addictions program where previously they were using alcohol in an unsupervised and self-destructive manner.
- The program's presence has reportedly reduced the need for police intervention to deal with intoxicated individuals on the streets, and in turn reduced the incidence of such individuals facing "drunk and disorderly" charges, which placed a burden on the local justice system without apparent benefit to the individuals with addictions problems.
- Clients served by the Harm Reduction program reportedly require far fewer hospital interventions (emergency and ambulance services, frequent hospital stays). The 10 clients are provided with health care services by the Ottawa Inner City Health project.

#### Client Comments

The research to develop this case study included interviews with eight clients of the Shepherds of Good Hope's Harm Reduction program. Their comments included:

- "I was barred from other shelters in Ottawa (because of depression and drug use). I went to the Salvation Army Men's Hostel and they directed me to Hope Outreach (Shepherds of Good Hope), and I've been here ever since."

*30 year old female*

- "I was in jail for seven years. I left the halfway house after serving my term. I was unemployed and homeless and ended up in jail again for three years. Then I served another 2-year term in jail. The last time I was released I found out about Hope Community (Shepherds of Good Hope) from its Executive Director. They took me in. I hope to find a job soon, settle down and find a place to live."

*47 year old male*

## **5. Lessons Learned related to NHI**

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

- The demand for Harm Reduction program services continues to increase, yet funding for such programs remains very limited and this particular program's sustainability remains an issue for the agency.
- A more streamlined process to obtain SCPI funding once the project had been conceived and a detailed proposal developed, would have enabled the Program to start operations sooner.