

**Community Case Study  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan**

**1. Introduction**

This case study of Saskatoon 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 Saskatoon'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

The Saskatoon YWCA offers emergency shelter for women and their children and the Salvation Army Men's Hostel provides beds for men. Both facilities offer long-term accommodation. Interval House provides emergency shelter for women and their children escaping domestic violence. The Saskatoon Tribal Council operates a Safe House for children and youth at risk. The Saskatoon Food Bank gives groceries to those in need and Street Worker, Inc. provides food and basics such as sleeping bags to individuals who are living on the streets. EGADZ and the Saskatoon Friendship Inn are two places that provide supports such as nutritious meals.

In June of 1999 a "Report on Homelessness in Saskatoon" discussed the condition of homelessness in the City of Saskatoon. Five groups were contacted including the Saskatoon City Police Department, three agencies providing services and the Saskatchewan Department of Social Services. Each group specialized in one particular sector of the homeless population with some overlap. In the report, using the capacity of the various agencies, agencies caseloads and other observations, it was estimated the size of the homeless population in Saskatoon to be 369 a night.<sup>1</sup> Male youth were identified as a sector with the greatest need for facilities and supports.

The Report also states that all sources generally agreed that homelessness is a symptom rather than an "end-state" in itself, and that providing short-term solutions, such as housing with no supports, may not alleviate the underlying conditions in the majority of cases. It concluded that long lasting interventions are necessary.<sup>2</sup>

### Community planning

The community had previously established a solid network of agencies dealing with affordable, safe, public housing. Also some groups had done recent studies related to homelessness. For example, the Youth Resources Development Network looked at the resources available and accessed by youth in the city. The Metis and First Nations had consulted their communities to gain a more in-depth understanding of homelessness and how it affects Aboriginal people. No community-wide planning to address homelessness had taken place prior to the NHI.

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<sup>1</sup> Subsequent experience in Saskatoon (in particular the demand for existing and new services) suggests, according to key observers in the City, that this figure underestimated the actual amount of homelessness in the City.

<sup>2</sup> This conclusion was re-emphasized in the community's homelessness plan under the federal initiative.

Involvement by federal, provincial and municipal and governments

In 1987, the city held a public forum on housing in Saskatoon, which resulted in the establishment of the Social Housing Advisory Committee (SHAC). The Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) is also a city initiative that focuses on coordinating and providing better financing for affordable housing. In 1999, the province and the city conducted research on the number and use of emergency crisis beds in Saskatoon.

The Provincial Regional Intersectorial Committee, made up of representatives of provincial government departments, works towards collective planning and coordinating at a provincial level. Currently, the priority areas are early childhood education and children who are not in school.

In 1999 senior federal officials established the Saskatoon Community Partnership Committee (SCPC) as a formal way for the three levels of government and Aboriginal leaders to network and communicate. SCPC has representatives from the Government of Saskatchewan, the Federal Government, the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (represented by the Saskatoon Tribal Council-Urban Committee) and the City of Saskatoon. The SCPC does not focus specifically on homelessness, but housing and other social issues are examined.

### **3. How Saskatoon Has Responded to the Federal Government Initiative**

Initial work by HRDC

Prior to the NHI in 1998 Minister Bradshaw came to Saskatoon, visiting homelessness service providers and people who used the services. Once the NHI was announced and Saskatoon was designated as a SCPI community in June, 2000 (the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative is the primary funding program under the NHI), the local HRDC office asked the SCPC to facilitate the communication of SCPI to the community. A Steering Committee was established, to which each level of government recommended one staff person, with the city taking the lead role. The city also provided in-kind support, such as a facilitator who allocated part of his time to this project, office space, photocopying services and communication through the city's Web site.

SCPC representatives spoke with service providers and community leaders to establish who else should be on the Steering Committee to begin developing the community plan to address homelessness, which was a step that was required in order to obtain the community's SCPI allocation. Throughout the various stages of developing and implementing the community plan, the seven agencies or government positions represented on the Steering Committee have remained constant. At appropriate times, different community members with particular interests or expertise have been added to support the Steering Committee's work. The committee views

itself as a working group, which focuses on consulting with the community and assisting HRDC with the NHI work.

### Community planning process

Saskatoon uses the shared community model to plan and implement its response to the NHI. The city, with the support of the Steering Committee, applied for and received SCPI planning funding to hire two consultants to help organize the community and support the development of a community plan to address the homelessness situation in the city of Saskatoon.

The consultants and some members of the Steering Committee gathered information from recent reports on homelessness and conducted interviews with and surveyed 45 organizations providing services to people who are homeless. The organizations ranged from direct service providers to non-profit housing groups, health care professionals and academics from the University of Saskatchewan. The findings focused on the assets and needs of agencies and how these agencies could better meet the needs of people who are homeless. The findings were distributed in a draft format to 75 community organizations in December 2000.

The Steering Committee then organized two community-wide consultations. The first was held in February 2001 to discuss the draft community plan, and was attended by 63 stakeholders, representing 46 organizations. This was the first time that all the organizations had an opportunity to come together to focus on the issue of homelessness. It allowed organizations to look at what each was doing within the larger community framework and answer such questions as: where are we, where do we want to go from here and how do we get there? The information gathered from this meeting formed the basis of a draft statement of priorities and principles for action. Before the next consultation, held in March 2001, draft information was again distributed within the community. After discussions at the second consultation, the "Saskatoon Community Plan for Homelessness and Housing, City of Saskatoon, April 2001" was finalized and was approved by HRDC in June 2001.

The call for SCPI proposals was done through a variety of methods such as word-of-mouth, advertising on the city's Web site and in the local newspaper and announcing it at meetings. Individuals and groups submitted proposals directly to HRDC. The call yielded requests for sixteen information packages. The information packages available from HRDC helped to explain the SCPI funding criteria and Saskatoon's identified needs, and guided applicants through the proposal process. HRDC staff also assisted any group that came to the local office for advice on the process. Nine applications were received and eight were endorsed by the SCPI Steering Committee; one was not supported; and one, although supported initially by the Steering Committee, did not proceed because the organization in the end did not have the necessary capacity. Eight unsolicited proposals were subsequently received throughout the fall and winter of 2001-2002.

HRDC makes an executive summary of proposals that fit the SCPI funding criteria and shares them with Steering Committee members. The proposal is discussed and HRDC will follow up on concerns or issues of Committee members, for example, potential partnerships the applicant could pursue to enhance the project. Once the Steering Committee recommends the proposal, local HRDC staff work closely with the applicant to finalize the proposal before sending it to Regina. There, the HRDC regional office reviews the proposal and sends it to Ottawa for final approval.

### *Aboriginal and Youth funding*

Both the Metis and the First Nations people conducted research among Aboriginal people who were homeless in the urban centres of Saskatoon in 2000, with funding provided by HRDC. The documents produced are titled “1000 Voices” and the “Urban First Nations Peoples Without Homes in Saskatchewan.” The purpose of the research was to enable the community to gain a better understanding of the extent of homelessness among Aboriginal people, and to identify gaps in programming and service delivery. The research validated the community’s understanding that homelessness problems were related to issues of poverty and that the homeless included people of all ages with varying levels of education.

In 2001, an employee of HRCC Saskatoon carried out a Youth Interest Survey, asking youth who are at risk of being homeless and living in Saskatoon about their hopes and dreams, their day-to-day issues and what types of supports would best suit their needs.

HRDC informed the community about the NHI Youth and UAS funding through community discussions and the call for proposals in the local newspapers. Groups submitting a proposal to HRDC that fits within the community plan criteria are supported to develop a proposal. All of the proposals are then shared with the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee has supported all of the youth and UAS proposals brought to the table. Letters of support are then submitted with the proposal and it follows the same process as SCPI funding proposals to obtain approval.

### Gaps and priorities

The community plan identifies priorities that require immediate attention in the following four areas:

- Support/funding is needed to address staffing and support service shortfalls, and also to increase food support programs at the Friendship Inn and the Food Bank.
- Youth aged 15–26 need a safe place to stay for a night or a few days, with access to basic supports if requested.
- Singles need better support for existing shelter and services and development of short-stay options, including better detoxification facilities and safe overnight housing.

- Aboriginals, including Treaty and non-Treaty status, as well as Metis, need funding of Aboriginal organizations to start to address housing issues.

Each area also has transitional and long-term needs identified.

#### Implementation to date

At the time of the case study, the following projects had been approved (and in some cases implemented):

<b>Projects Approved to Date</b>
City of Saskatoon: planning funding
YWCA of Saskatoon shelter for single women and women and their children who need emergency and temporary accommodation: develop a business plan and support salaries at the YWCA
Saskatoon Food Bank: purchase the building they are housed in
Crisis Intervention, a 24 hour mobile crisis service: hire staff to help those in need find and maintain housing and establish a client-centred database to develop further identified services.
Saskatchewan Housing Coalition (provides housing and supports to people who have a mental illness): do a pilot study of a Wrap-Around Process counselling model
Salvation Army Saskatoon: renovate the men's hostel section
Save the Children Canada: hire four at-risk youths and one youth counsellor to form a group, Sexually Exploited Youth Speak Out. The at-risk youths will support other young people involved in the sex trade who are attempting to make a transition to a more positive life style.
Saskatchewan Native Theater Company (focuses on Aboriginal issues): involve youth who are, or are at risk of being, homeless in writing and acting in a play about their daily experiences
Western Metis Women's Association: hold a three-day workshop for professionals who deal with at-risk youth
Turning Pages Youth Care Home (long-term residential care for youths with emotional, spiritual, physical and/or mental health problems): purchase a 10-bed transitional house for youth at risk
Central Urban Metis Foundation (transitional housing for single Metis parents): purchase a building
Quint Development Corporation: purchase, renovate and furnish a 15-bed capacity building as a shelter for young men, expected to be chiefly of Aboriginal descent
Tamara House (formerly a drop-in healing centre): furnish its new transitional housing facility for women seeking healing and safety who are the survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

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

- Service providers in Saskatoon report a trend in which clients are increasing in numbers, while their age is decreasing.
- As in most SCPI communities, everyone spoken with emphasized that one of the main reasons for homelessness is the shortage of affordable housing, and took the view that any solution had to include the provision of more affordable housing.
- Those involved appreciated the community consultations because it was the first time interested community members had the opportunity to come together to focus on homelessness, and the NHI funding helped to validate the work the front-line service providers are doing in the community. Community members said they felt that their views were reflected in the final version of the community plan. Several people mentioned that the planning process reminded them that the strength of a community is enhanced "when the community can decide how they wish to fit a program on homelessness into their already well-established network."
- The flexibility of the SCPI funds was seen by the community as a major reason for its success in Saskatoon. Because it was not restricted to a specific type of funding (capital funding, or program operations, for example), the Steering Committee and HRDC were able to find creative ways to fund important initiatives that otherwise would not have been possible.

While the UAS funding could only be spent on projects that related to Aboriginal homelessness, in Saskatoon there was no requirement that agencies submitting proposals for UAS funds were themselves based in the Aboriginal community or had a minimum proportion of Aboriginal Board members or staff. All UAS-funded projects (and indeed SCPI and youth projects as well) serve primarily Aboriginal clientele, and two of three UAS projects are run by Aboriginal organizations, as are two of the three projects funded under youth homelessness.

- Most members of the Steering Committee said they had learned a lot about other agencies' work during the planning process and now have a better understanding of the

community issues relating to housing and homelessness and the supports available to people.

- The work of the local HRDC office is greatly appreciated in the community for a variety of reasons: staff members have demonstrated a willingness to learn from the community and to build on existing community supports, have worked effectively with community groups and have tried to make every application proceed. Also HRDC staff responded promptly to Steering Committees questions and any concerns raised.
- People spoken with felt that the general population in Saskatoon was more aware of homelessness as a result of all the project openings and community meetings, which are well publicized by the various media.
- Sustainability is one of the core issues in Saskatoon. Initially there was some misunderstanding because the community expected the province to pick up the ongoing operational funding, although HRDC staff made an effort to help the community understand not to expect this. Also, it was stated that the short duration of the SCPI funding made it conducive to capital expenditures. Two community people wondered why the money could not be put into a trust and used over a period of time, thus helping to deal with the problem of sustainability for program funding.
- A community evaluation of SCPI was held in June 2002. At this meeting the community expressed the desire to have the Steering Committee, or some form of it, continue to meet after the NHI and support the networking among community groups.

#### 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:

- Having the flexibility of different members' participation in the Steering Committee's work at different times allowed for more people to be involved in some aspect of the process.
- The community supports the idea that if the NHI was renewed, funding should continue to remain in separate streams. This is supported because the majority of non-Aboriginal groups have the staff or the capacity to hire consultants who have the knowledge to develop stronger proposals. It is felt that having to compete with agencies that have more resources would put the Aboriginal groups at a disadvantage.



- The community works best together if the focus of an initiative is clear before consultations begin. This helps to ensure that irrelevant issues that could be detrimental to the process are kept out of the task at hand. A community such as Saskatoon has hundreds of non-profit organizations all with their own issues and funding needs. If the process is left unguided or unfocused it could become uncontrollable. The Saskatoon Committee did an excellent job guiding the process.
- It is very important that people seen as leading the process are respected in the community and seen as having a high level of integrity and competence. Additionally the development of the plan and the subsequent decisions of the committee must be based on the plan and sound principles.

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