

**Project Case Study  
Emergency Assistance Fund  
Thunder Bay, Ontario**

**1. Introduction**

This case study of the Emergency Assistance Fund is one of a series of case studies of projects funded at least in part through the federal government's National Homelessness Initiative (NHI). The case study first describes the project including: conditions prior to implementation, what the project involves and its objectives. It then describes project implementation to date. Finally, it notes outcomes to date, including comments from clients where available.

Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) is producing these case studies in order to contribute to the government's understanding of how NHI is working in individual communities at the project level, to gauge the extent to which the objectives are being achieved at this mid-way stage of the three-year Initiative, and to determine what can be learned from the experiences of particular projects that may be applicable to others participating in the Initiative.

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 on a series of interviews with people representing the following groups:

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

**2. Description of the Project**

Conditions prior to project implementation

Similar to many other smaller urban communities, Thunder Bay has a higher percentage of people who are in the category of relative as opposed to absolute homelessness. For a number of years there has been an informal network of service providers who contact one another to access services for their clients. There has been no formal coordination of these services.

A few agencies have had access to small external amounts of emergency funds to support clients who were in dire need, but most of the time agencies access their internal emergency funds for their own clients.

### What the project involves

The project that was proposed by the community of service providers in Thunder Bay focused on preventing homelessness, limiting the severity and the duration of people's stay in shelters and transitional housing, and offering other supports not usually available to people in transition. The project received SCPI Urgent Needs funding and ran from February 12<sup>th</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup>.

To implement the project, the Community Housing Coalition, a body of about 20 agencies that had been working together formally on housing issues since 1998, established an Emergency Assistance Fund Committee (EAFC) comprising four service agencies--three that work directly with clients (the Salvation Army, the Community Residence and Shelter House), and a fourth, the Lakehead Social Planning Council, that administers the Emergency Assistance Fund (EAF).

Under this project emergency funds in the amount of \$82,927 were made available for individuals or families living on the street, in temporary shelters, in transitional housing or in locations not meant for human habitation. The principles of the fund were:

- accessibility on a 24-hour basis
- flexibility
- most urgent needs prioritized in accordance with the guidelines established
- provision of funds to the client expeditiously

The funds were used to cover costs related to temporary shelter in a hotel or motel, identification retrieval, prescriptions, protective clothing and infant supplies. The funds were allocated to people only once all other community resources had been exhausted and once two committee partners were assured to the best of their knowledge that the funds were going towards legitimate emergency situations. The options available were discussed with the client and the best option for the client and the requesting agency was selected for action.

Some agencies had previous experience in dealing with particular emergency needs. For example, the Community Residence had a history of receiving donations and providing for infant needs. The Community Residence also had a good system worked out with a pharmacy that was opened 24 hours a day within the city. Medical requests and infant

needs under the EAF went through the Community Residence. Shelter House had some clothing and had a system developed to support people's transportation needs using bus tickets. This experience was also drawn on in the implementation of the project.

Each agency that accessed the funding on behalf of clients was able to do so in the way it fit best into their own administrative processes. Some agencies had no emergency funds to cover such expenses and were given funding from the EAF directly. Others would bill the Lakehead Social Planning Council on a monthly basis and be reimbursed.

The Emergency Assistance Fund Committee is currently applying for another emergency assistance fund project through SCPI.

### Objectives of the project

The objectives of the project are to provide the following services to individuals and families who are homeless, in transition or living in substandard housing:

1. temporary shelter in a hotel or motel
2. emergency necessities, i.e. medical prescriptions, infant supplies, protective clothing and local transportation
3. emergency travel to other communities
4. identification retrieval

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

The project was implemented as soon as it received approval from Ottawa. To deal with common questions from agencies about the criteria used to access funds for clients and the process involved, the EAF held two public meetings. By the end of February and early March the EAF project was reaching the people on the streets who needed the support.

The project has been completed, as follows:

- Financial assistance for temporary shelter in a hotel or motel was provided to one female single parent, one single female and one single male. All individuals were homeless and not able to utilize temporary shelters due to on-going medical health issues, wheelchair accessibility or safety concerns for the children involved. About 20 percent more money was used in this category than had originally been allocated due to the rising cost of utilities and the shelters' inability to appropriately meet the needs of the clients.

- Emergency necessities were provided to approximately 47 individuals, including infant supplies, prescriptions and clothing. Numerous people were given Thunder Bay transit tickets to travel to Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Plan offices to secure social assistance. More individuals than originally anticipated needing prescriptions, infant needs and transportation by taxi, all caused over expenditure in this category, but the amount allocated for clothing was not totally spent because the coldest part of winter was over before the money for protective clothing was available.
- Emergency travel to other communities was provided to seven adults to go back to school, return to work or family, attend treatment programs or escape violent situations and move to a safer community. No travel was authorized until verification of travel destination and evidence of an action plan were presented. Two people had travel expenses paid by Ontario Works and the EAF contributed a modest travel allowance and an emergency food hamper.
- Identification retrieval assisted two people, one of whom wanted to enter a drug and alcohol treatment program and a second who wanted to seek employment.

#### 4. Outcomes to Date

##### Preliminary observations

While it is premature to make any assessment of the impacts of the EAF on the lives of its many clients in the longer term, it is possible to make the following preliminary observations:

- Obtaining approval by two member agencies was seen as too time consuming and at times difficult to arrange on short notice. It was decided that in the future, approval of only one member agency would be required.
- The same funding categories will be kept for the next proposal, but they will be based on the expenditures in this first Urgent Need project, so the original percentages of funding for each category will be altered accordingly.
- One more member agency will be added for the next project. The Lutheran Community Care Centre will become an Emergency Assistance Fund Committee member. It was felt the Lutheran Community Care Centre was in a good location, it had expressed an interest in taking on the added responsibility, and it will help remove some of the time pressure on the other three groups.

- Front line workers stated that they have found it extremely positive to be able to meet people's emergency needs. One person said, "It enabled us to provide services not offered before. Several families got stuck in Thunder Bay because their car broke down or their money was stolen. We were able to offer a choice where previously there was none."

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